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# J E S U S

*of Nazareth: The Hidden Years*

Robert Aron,<sup>1898-</sup>

Translated from the French by Frances Frenaye

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FOR SIMONE RAYMOND WEIL  
*this book which owes so much to her affection*

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*A mystery between two mysteries.*

*A mystery apparently human*

*between two mysteries divine.*

*Jesus' hidden years.*

# T

HE hidden years of Jesus' life, those which the Gospels leave almost completely in the shadows, run from his return from Bethlehem to Nazareth, in earliest childhood, to his baptism by Saint John the Baptist, at the start of his preaching. They represent a period of his life marked by none of the supernatural signs which the Gospels tell us were attendant upon it both before and after. A Jewish writer, attached to his own beliefs and respectful of those of his Christian brothers, may study them without feeling indiscreet and at the same time without denying his personal tradition. However formidable may be the difficulties of such a study, encouragement from two separate quarters has made the risk seem worth taking.

First that of Christian theologians, both Catholic and Protestant, who by their admission that Jesus had a double nature, human and divine, implicitly authorize the writer to deal with his human side alone. Among them,

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Saint Cyril of Alexandria declares: "The Wise Evangelist, having shown us the Word made Flesh, goes on to demonstrate that . . . he complied with the laws of the nature which he had made his own." And Calvin: "Unless we wish to deny that Christ was made a real man we must not be ashamed to confess that he voluntarily submitted to all those things which cannot be separated from human nature."

A thoroughgoing Christian may find the present book incomplete. But in spite of its self-imposed limitations it may have something to teach him.

Nine-tenths of the life of the being who for two thousand years has been the focus of hundreds of millions of people's religious aspiration are totally unknown. The mystery of the Nativity has for centuries been told over and over; the mysteries of the Passion and Resurrection are familiar to both believers and unbelievers, but the thirty years between, the years of childhood, adolescence and maturity, so crucial in any human life, may as well never have existed.

The lives of Pontius Pilate and Herod, who endure simply because they were his contemporaries, are well documented, and those of Mohammed, Calvin and Voltaire, who respectively rivaled, reformed and denied his Church, are amply known. But the life of Jesus between the ages of one and thirty hangs on a few lines from one of the Gospels and a minimum of commentaries upon them.

The Gospel according to Saint Luke, after telling us that the newborn babe was taken by his mother and Joseph from Bethlehem back to Nazareth, reveals in

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twelve words that he went through the normal physical and mental stages of a child's development: "And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom . . ." At twelve years of age this progress is confirmed: "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man."

It is at this time, in the verses immediately preceding this one, that we have the only known episode of Jesus' childhood.

*Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover.*

And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem, after the custom of the feast.

And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not of it.

But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey; and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintances.

And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him.

And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions.

And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers.

And when they saw him they were amazed: and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? Behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.

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And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?

And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them.

And he went down with them, and came unto Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart.

The above are the only references in the Gospels to the hidden years.

In the liturgy of the Passion, in the office for Good Friday, the sixth-century hymn by Venantius Fortunatus says in two lines:

*Lustra sex qui iam peregit,  
Tempus implens corporis . . .*

Thirty years he dwelt among us,  
His appointed time fulfilled . . .

Pascal treats them in the single sentence: "Of his thirty-three years he lived thirty without making himself known."

As for the apocryphal gospels, which do contain some lore of the early years, we may say, with Daniel-Rops, that "a biographer of Christ can find practically no use for them, so meager is the information which they add to the New Testament story."

Such a paucity of facts might well discourage biographical treatment. But it need not block the aim of the present book, which is to retrace a spiritual journey.

If the thirty all-important years in which Jesus pre-

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pared his preaching mission are so obscure, perhaps it is because they were spent among the Jews. The purest Jewish thought, such as we find it in the Old Testament and the Talmud, makes little of facts unless they have some religious or spiritual significance. The day-to-day life of a man, no matter how great he may be, is of no interest except at the moments when it manifests God's will.

In the case of Moses, for instance, the Bible dwells at length upon the fateful circumstances of his birth, but there follows a long blank, interrupted by one isolated episode, until his life became one with that of the chosen people. The New Testament seems to deal with Jesus the same way. As the Israeli historian, Klausner, says: "The Jews . . . were interested in Jesus' life only . . . after his meeting with John the Baptist. For what had a man's private life and family and home to do with sacred history, which . . . was purely an aspect of religion and but served to manifest the workings of God in the life of mankind?"

Hence the silence of first-century Jews about Jesus' hidden years. In their eyes this period did not seem to have sufficient importance in God's eye to merit survival. But in the disorder of today it may have a message for us.

The synagogue at Leghorn, destroyed during the war, was one of the largest and most famous of Italy. The religious community of which the great Italian rabbi, Benamozegh (one of the principal Jewish thinkers of the 19th century), was the spiritual leader, is so small today that on arriving in the town I understood when I heard it

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said: "there are no longer any Jews here." Even Rabbi Benamozegh's tomb is no longer the one where he was buried; his remains having been removed to another.

However, the few hours spent in Leghorn, in the atmosphere where he lived, experiencing the fervor of a Sabbath similar to those he celebrated, was a great religious lesson.

One approaches the hall in a former rabbinical school, no longer used as such, where the worship is held today, through wide fields of grass full of the sound of birds. The Saturday morning service, of a length unusual in our Parisian synagogues, lasts from eight o'clock until eleven-thirty without a moment's interruption in the chant of prayers and readings recited by several male voices. There is no organ or any other evidence of musical instrument; no tune, in the ordinary sense of the word; not a trace of the influence of any more modern service, or of any other tradition. The uninterrupted flow of syllables is given the single tonality which corresponds to their vowels; a flow which sometimes swells when the sacred nature of the ceremony is emphasized, then subsides at moments of lesser intensity; a flow which by a crescendo as unassuming and commanding as a human breath reaches its climax at the moment when the scrolls of the Law, the Torah, are taken from the tabernacle. The *Shema Israel*, the affirmation of the oneness of God (Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is One) is often adorned, in the Parisian synagogues where the rite is much modernized, with a touch of *bel canto*. The cantor, after a moment's pause, will use all the resources of his art and all the reserves of his voice. In Leghorn, where

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the mode of worship has not changed since Benamozegh, and possibly not for centuries, the sharp enunciation of monotheism does not evoke in the slightest music of the concert hall. It rises, during the three hours, without anything to announce its coming or mark its entrance, in that harmony of the chant, like a wave rising to a crest and breaking on the shore; it is one inspiration among others and is part of all the others, a sigh more profound, perhaps, more emphasized, but uttered in the same rhythm as the rest of the service. It is not necessary, in order to proclaim the unity of God, to make use of an operatic air, or of bravura style: the plain voices of men in prayer is the only orchestration needed for this elemental affirmation from which Judaism is born.

During the silence of the Eighteen Benedictions, the song of the birds comes in through the open windows and seems to relate the universe to the meditations of men. All this evoked the impression of a ritual comfortable and unadorned, as well as sublimely impressive. The rabbi, who is but one priest among all the priests who are the children of Israel, is not a professional and does not have to wear a cassock or robe in order to conduct the service. His clothes are covered only with the folds of an ample prayer shawl, a *tallith*. Sitting among the faithful on the central bench in the room, turning to face the tabernacle at the appropriate moments in the service, he is a little like the head of a family in the midst of his children, distinguished from them solely by the respect which he inspires in them and by the devotions which he performs on their behalf.

One would like to venture far back into the past of

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Israel, to rediscover, perhaps, at certain points, the purity and innocence of ancient ceremonies in which the Jews have participated for thousands of years; those perhaps at which Maimonides assisted, or Rashi, or even Hillel, and those in which Jesus took part.

The nature of the Jewish service in the time of Jesus, the Jewish worship in which Jesus participated, the prayers he spoke . . . these were part of the extraordinary revelation that gripped the author of this book during his pilgrimage to the temple of Benamozegh.

The years during which Jesus recited these prayers, the years when he lived "without being known," these are the hidden years.

For ten years, in the homes of both Jewish and Christian priests, in the Rabbinical School in Paris where Chief Rabbi Schilli directed our inexperience, as well as in the Catholic Monastery of En Calcat, and in the Israeli Kibbutz of Ein Hanatsiv, we sought for the trace, or rather the traces of the two religions which have proceeded from the same tradition. Of this search this book was born, and perhaps it will help to answer some of the spiritual questions set before us all today.

Two thousand years ago, in a part of Palestine where the religion of Israel had conserved its purity, a Jewish child was born. This book is not an attempt to recover irreparably lost facts, but rather to sift historical and spiritual influences. It has three purposes: first, to remind Jews of certain features of their religion; second, to give Christians a feeling for their religious origins; and

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third, by pointing up the conflict between the Jewish and pagan worlds of Jesus' day to illuminate the conflict between contemporary Christianity and a new paganism, a conflict which cannot be won unless we draw, discerningly, upon the sacred heritage which underlay Jesus' upbringing.

P A R T   O N E

*Before Jerusalem*

# 1.

## The Return to Nazareth

**W**HEN, just before Jesus' birth, his parents undertook to go from Nazareth to Bethlehem, a three-day caravan journey, it was for two coincidental and complementary reasons.

According to the Gospel of Saint Matthew, it was in order to fulfill the Old Testament's prophecy of the Messiah's birthplace:

*And thou Bethehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.<sup>1</sup>*

According to the contemporary Catholic historian, Monsignor Ricciotti, their journey was also a conse-

<sup>1</sup> Matthew, 2:6. The original prophecy is in Micah, 5:2, But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel.

quence of the Roman occupation of Palestine. The Jews, like all Orientals, remained attached to the place of origin of their tribe or family, to their father's house (*bet abot*). The father's house might be broken up and the members of the family scattered, but: "No matter where they went the new units preserved the memory of the old, from a demographic as well as a geographic point of view."

The census of the population of Palestine, ordered by the Roman governor of Syria, Quirinus, just at the time of Jesus' birth, was anything but agreeable to the Jews. What "occupied" nation would not be apprehensive of any such measure imposed by the "occupying forces" upon it? In the case of the Jews, faithful to a religion which they considered superior to that of their idolatrous conquerors, there was not only apprehension but also a strong will to "resist." The Romans, on their side, were skilled politicians. In order to obtain as large a measure as possible of "collaboration," they concentrated on the end rather than the means; the census must be taken, but they did not insist that it be at the actual place of residence, in the Roman manner. The Jews were left free to follow their own custom of grouping themselves according to their place of origin. And so Joseph chose to present himself at Bethlehem, which as a descendant of David (Saint Luke, 2:4) he considered his family home.

There were no Roman roads in the land, and the journey, broken by overnight stays at the house of a friend or a public stopping place, could not have taken less than three or four days. In view of the circumstances

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under which it was made, we may say that the child Jesus began his life under the double aegis of loyal obedience to Jewish tradition and opposition to the customs imposed by pagan rule.

Nazareth, to which Joseph brought back Mary and Jesus, supposedly two years later, was a small village, gay or somber, according to the contemporary historian's retrospective point of view. According to Ricciotti, it was "a negligible, in no way particularly attractive spot, confined to the eastern part of the present town, overlooking the Esdrelon valley." The unevenness of the terrain may seem picturesque to a present-day visitor, but to the biblical inhabitants it was doubtless only an inconvenience. Caves, dug out of the side of a hill, served to store food and also as dwelling places. A spring, known today as the Virgin's Fountain, supplied water to the local people, as well as to caravans from the desert. All around there are low hills, and a thirty-foot cliff near the presumed site of the ancient synagogue. A mile and a half away a mountain, called Djebel el Qafse, rises nine hundred feet above the river. The natural attractions are few; according to Ricciotti, Nazareth had hardly any share of the beauties of Canaan.

But the Frenchman, Daniel-Rops, and the Israeli, Klausner, hold a different view. This village, which is mentioned in no ancient writings, not even the Talmud, and barely named as the subject of a third-century complaint, seems to them extremely agreeable. Daniel-Rops sees "a circle of harmonious hills, dotted with white-washed, mud-walled farmhouses, slender dark cypresses among the olive groves, broad fields of grapes and wheat.

The gardens are filled with lilies and verbena, and bougainvilleas spread their episcopal copes over the walls." Klausner's description of "the charming hills of Galilee, the surroundings of Nazareth . . . stamped with tenderness, beauty and peace" is equally at odds with Ricciotti's.

However this may be, the modern traveler cannot but be struck at first sight by the majesty of the scene. He finds Nazareth built on a balcony of hills overlooking the plain which was formerly a highway for foreign invaders and often a battleground. And yet these gentle slopes and ravines, these huddled houses are far from the turbulent mainstream of history. One can imagine that this is a country of the soul, a natural site for some sort of religious evolution.

Whether or not Nazareth is physically a part of Canaan, it is spiritually close to this Promised Land, important even in pre-biblical days for its contributions to the birth of more than one religion. For from time immemorial Canaan had a predestined sacred character. Everything combined to prepare it for this role, even the configuration of its rivers and valleys. Never, even in prehistoric days, was Canaan a flooded plain, like the Nile valley; its only hope of irrigation was in water from above. The earliest inhabitants' invocations to the heavens reflected their absolute dependence upon rain. In this way was born the adoration of transcendent divinities which may be considered the prototype of the worship of today. As the *midrash*, or rabbinical commentary, of Ecclesiastes tells us: "Earth can be fertilized only by waters from on high, and so men raise their eyes

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to heaven and realize that they are dependent upon it."

Both geographically and climatically Canaan seems made for religious experience. "The wind," writes the historian Adolphe Lods, "is not the beneficent sea breeze, but the capricious and destructive sirocco . . . the people's religious thinking leads them to see the divine not so much in the normal course of things as in its unpredictable interruptions, not in the natural phenomena favorable to man but in those which strike him with terror."

Storms, floods, and earthquakes, no matter how infrequent, haunt the conscience of primitive peoples. They come to the conclusion that God is not a tutelary spirit, peacefully sharing with man the benefits of his heaven. He is kindly, to be sure, but he knows how to lighten and thunder; he does not calm the storm, or stop war or even prevent accidents. He has not taken on, as in our day, the aspect of an indulgent protector of those who choose to believe in him. Inserting himself into history, at his creature's side, making no attempt to prevent the rumble of the thunder, the inundation of fields and cities, the destruction wrought by plague, war and death, he seems to suggest that all these accidents belong to a divine plan and have to do with salvation.

This dramatic sense of God, or of the gods and genies whose multiplicity led to his uniqueness, this perpetual debate between the land of Palestine and a sky from which man expected everything, left its imprint not only on a succession of peoples—the Phoenicians, the Canaanites, the Hebrews—but also on the very soil, impregnated by the divine and marked with the traces of

vaniſhed forms of adoration and abolished ſacrifices. Every mountain, river, ſpring, tree, cave and even ſtone calls up the presence of a deity, or that of the prayers addressed to him. The excavation of prehistoric ſantuaries has revealed all ſorts of traces; at Gezer, for instance, eight great ſtones in a row, ſome of them roughly ſquared, the others rounded, ranging from ſix to ten feet in height. What prayers and ſacrifices, we wonder, did they receive? The top of one of them seems to be worn and polished by "the kisses, caresses and anointments of generations of the faithful." In the Negev desert, around Beersheba, and on the coast, near Ashqelon, archaeologists have found the ſuperimposed layers of ſuccesſive civilizations, from neolithic days to our own. Within the range of our immediate interest, the Philistines, the Hebrews, the Greeks, the Romans and the Crusaders have trod this ground, leaving the altar of one religion upon another.

Stone, which ſurvives its builder, has always been a vehicle of devotion. But in this religious reliquary, there are also remains of human ſacrifices, which bear witness to the drama, the frenzy and the ſuffering which went with the apparition of divinity. There are urns containing the ſkeletons of babies no more than a week old, apparently ſtuffed into them alive and covered with sand, which has preserved them far longer than if they had enjoyed a normal life and received conventional burial. In the remains of a wall of the same ſanctuary there is, alongside the babies, the ſkeleton of a rheumatic old woman. Were the gods persuaded to be content with a less tender offering, or did a mother or grandmother

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choose to be buried alive beside the baby she had rocked on her knees?

Such things defy explanation; they must remain among the many secrets of the Holy Land. But one thing we know for certain: this land, consecrated from the beginning to the most rudimentary forms of religion, became the seat of the most important of all metamorphoses of the religious spirit, of which Israel was the agent.

We have had a glimpse of its polydemonic period, of the multiplication of genies and familiar spirits. Among the Canaanites, who preceded the Hebrews, there was worship of Astartes and Baals. And what were Baals? They were numberless local divinities, worshipped on high hills and under green trees. For there was not a single clod of earth or a single plant root through which the divine did not circulate, infinitely varied in shape and substance, with its only unity in the superstitious respect accorded to it by man. Each such divinity bore the name of Baal, accompanied by a sort of surname derived from the nature of the sacred object (mountain, tree or spring) or the place where it was located. Thus there was Baal Lebanon, the lord of Lebanon; Baal Tamar, the spirit of the palm tree; Baalat Beer, the lady of the well; Baal Perazim, the lord of the openings, that is, the wells; Baalat Gebal and Baal Gebal, lady and lord of Byblos . . . Other divinities owed their name not to the place where they lived, but to the power attributed to them: Baal Marqod, lord of the dance; Baal Berit, god of oaths and pledges; Baal Marpe, the healer; Baal Gad, master of happiness; Baal Zebub (Beelzebub), lord of the flies.

The sedentary Canaanites counted on all these Baals to fertilize their soil, to assure the fecundity of their herds, to guarantee their health and happiness. In our day all this may seem naïve and superstitious. But these deities made for a sanctification of the world around man, a first religious fact of whose consequences we have not yet seen the end, and which may even arouse us to nostalgia. From this time to that of Jesus, Palestine became more and more divine, more and more human; supernatural manifestations multiplied, in response to the increasing fears and needs and hopes of man. Such a permeation with divinity was the outstanding attribute of this land, destined to be the source of good tidings and the scene of religious wars.

The good tidings, in the course of the centuries, assumed a variety of forms and of words to describe them. After the polydemonism of the Baals, submerged in matter, came the polytheism of gods whose earthly attachments were less local, so that they exercised a wider empire and had a function less subordinated to particular circumstances. The Canaanites adored Dagon, god of wheat and inventor of the plow; Shamash, the sun god, who gave light to man; Adad, the god of the storm, who thundered where he pleased. The name of the city of Jericho is derived from the word Yareah, moon, which suggests the existence of a moon deity. Reshep, the god of fire; Barak, the god of lightning; Gad, the god of fortune, whose cult persisted clandestinely even in the age of monotheism and who was perhaps also a god of death, antedating the Hebrews' Yahweh and constitut-

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ing a bridge to him—all these made up the polytheistic hierarchy, whose distinct and classified functions set it apart from the indiscriminate mass of demons and Baals which went before.

With its dedication to the divine on a broader and more orderly basis, with gods at the same time less numerous and more powerful, Palestine was still an essentially sanctified land, sanctified in its mountains and streams, its trees and dwellings. Only the formula of its sanctification was changed and perfected.

It was then that Israel ~~came~~, that after the Canaanites the Hebrews reached the land promised to the first patriarch, Abraham, and his descendants, and proceeded to bring about a religious revolution. To them the question was quite simple, or so it seems to us, three thousand two hundred years after they resolved it. This land, consecrated by others but now theirs, was not to be stripped of a single one of its religious attributes; not the sparsest of its groves, the driest of its deserts or the barest of its mountaintops was to be profaned. But its total sanctification was to proceed not from a multitude of gods, but from the one God of the Hebrews. A new form of worship came into being, the outstanding Jewish contribution to religion, in which as many prayers and blessings were showered upon the one God as had been directed to a multiplicity of gods before. A blessing upon every act, a prayer for every eventuality, an invocation with which to face every show of nature's power. The Hebrew prayed when he heard a clap of thunder, but not to a thunder god; he blessed the fruit of the vine,

but there was no bacchic deity. He prayed in spots where men had prayed before, but not to the local genies who were supposed to inhabit them.

Religion was a constant, but the nature of the communication with divinity varied with the passage from one age to another. Polytheism, with its specialized gods and rudimentary prayers, gave way to monolatry and monotheism, with their omnipresent God and diversified prayers. Monolatry was Israel's tribal worship of a single God (which left room for other peoples to have gods of their own); monotheism the transformation of Israel's God into the God of all mankind. All through these changing phases the land bore the same harvest of prayers, always abundant, but differently divided.

Throughout its prehistory and history, all the way to Jesus' return to Nazareth, at the beginning of his formative years, Palestine had the same vocation. Amid the mobility of its winds and waters and the permanence of its earth and stone, this was the land where man met God and God met man. A land where nothing was profane, because nothing was inanimate or inhuman, a land destined to revelations. Nazareth was a village marked by this destiny and peculiarly suited to be the site of a new episode of its fulfillment.

Palestine was not the only seat of Jewry at this time; its half-million inhabitants were only one-tenth of those that lived in Egypt and Greece and other profane lands. And Nazareth was hardly a dot on the map, numbering no more than a few hundred lowly people. It was an out-of-the-way, self-sufficient place; up until the fourth century A.D., although the rest of the country was very much

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"occupied," it seems to have suffered no infiltration of Greeks or Romans. The inhabitants were simple, peasants and rustic artisans, patriotic in the narrowest sense of the word, at least according to the more sophisticated townspeople, who spoke Greek and Latin. Their uncouth pronunciation of Aramaic, the common language of the time, caused them to be held up to ridicule. "Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?" said Nathaniel in the Gospel according to Saint John, just as Montesquieu asked: "How can anyone be a Persian?" The Nazarenes were contemptuously called *am ha-aretz*, men of the land. But the land of Palestine, the Eretz Israel, is impregnated with the presence of God. So that this sarcastic nickname was actually creditable to the Nazarenes; it defined their mission.

In returning to Nazareth the holy family was governed by the same principles that had determined its departure for Bethlehem: respect for Jewish tradition, which was particularly strong in this simple, isolated place; resistance to the Roman invaders, who had no hold upon it; and, of course, obedience to God, whose presence seemed so near in these surroundings.

Jesus' return to Nazareth coincided with a period when the doors of the temple of Janus in Rome were closed, because there was no war. But we know, to our cost, that the absence of war is not always peace.

Palestine's relation to Rome was that of what we call a "satellite." Herod was king, but although he was born on Jewish soil he was not of predominantly Jewish blood. His mother, Cypros, was Arabian; his father, Antipater,

an Idumaean, and neither of them of royal birth, so that Flavius Josephus describes him as "from a house of common people." His kingship was due neither to his adopted country nor to the will of his compatriots: he had sought and brought it back from Rome. Flavius Josephus, himself a renegade Jew and hence sympathetic toward him, describes not without admiration the circumstances of his investiture:

Messala and Atratinus after him convened the Senate, and presenting Herod, dwelt on the good deeds of his father . . . Antony came forward and informed them that it was also an advantage in their war with the Parthians that Herod should be king. And as this proposal was acceptable to all, they voted accordingly . . . Now when the Senate was adjourned Antony and Caesar went out with Herod between them, and the consuls and other magistrates leading the way, in order to sacrifice and to deposit the decree in the Capitol. Then Antony entertained him on the first day of his reign . . .

Such was the crowning of a collaborationist king. Herod won this reward by the extraordinary vigor with which, as governor of Galilee, he had pursued the "brigands," who may really have been political rebels. At his orders their chief, Ezekias, and a number of others were executed without trial, in violation of the Jewish law which safeguards an accused man and considers him innocent until he has been found guilty.

Before the Jewish Sanhedrin, called together to judge his impropriety, Herod did not present himself as cus-

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tom demanded, "humble . . . fearful . . . letting his hair grow long and wearing a black garment," but clad in purple and surrounded by armed soldiers. The judges were afraid; only one among them, Sameas, roused their sense of justice. They were about to condemn him when the high priest, Hyrcanus, put the sentence off until the next day and during the night helped Herod to get away. An unconventional disposal of the case, which Herod did not repay with gratitude, since later on, after he became king, he had the whole lot of his former judges, except Sameas, killed.

Herod remained faithful to Rome, and to whatever party seemed most likely to be in power. When Augustus overcame Antony, his benefactor, the King of Judea shifted his allegiance without the least loss of aplomb. Having paved the way for the change-over by sending troops to help Augustus's lieutenant, Ventidius, against Antony's gladiators, Herod went to see Augustus himself at Rhodes. Flavius Josephus tells us that he had laid aside his crown but not his dignity and that he boldly admitted having previously sent Antony money and supplies even if he had not fought at his side.

*I have not deserted him upon his defeat at Actium . . . but have preserved myself, though not as a valuable fellow soldier, yet certainly as a faithful counselor, when I demonstrated to him that the only way he had to save himself and not lose all his authority was to slay Cleopatra . . . None of such advices would he attend to, but preferred his own rash resolutions before them, which have happened unprofitably for him but profit-*

ably for thee . . . There is no room for me to deny what I have done . . . but if thou wilt put him out of the case, and only examine how I behave myself to my benefactors in general and what sort of friend I am, thou wilt find by experience that I shall do and be the same to myself.

No Greek or Roman historian is a model of exactitude. But under Flavius Josephus' rhetoric we can easily detect the gross wiles with which Herod sought to win over his new master. He brings out the fact that he had never fought against him with his own hands, he condemns the blind passion of his conquered enemy, wishes death to Cleopatra and finally swears fidelity. By putting forward his own "virtue," Herod contrived to keep a post in which he could continue to levy his exactions.

For Herod was a pitiless and depraved man. Although he called himself a Jew his court was given over to pagan excesses—adultery, incest and even sodomy—to cruelty in all its forms and to a display of luxury which was in painful contrast to the poverty of the subjected people. Here is how Monsignor Ricciotti describes one of the worst of his misdeeds:

*In the year 29 B.C. he committed his most tragic crime, reminiscent of that of Othello. On account of mere court gossip he killed his Hasmonaean wife, Myriam, with whom he was wildly in love. Then, crazed with grief, he ordered the servants to call out her name, as if she were still alive . . .*

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A few months later, he ordered the death of his mother-in-law, Alexandra. Two of the children born to him by Myriam, whom he claimed to love for her sake, were sent to Rome and hospitably received by Augustus, but as soon as they returned to Jerusalem he had them put to death, in spite of Augustus' efforts to save them. Sadistic and perhaps abnormal in other ways as well, such was the nature of the "friend and ally of Rome" who ruled over Palestine. Like many others of his kind, he had recourse to honeyed words and deception. One day, the Talmud tells us, he went anonymously to see a rabbi and tried to induce him to speak against the government. But the rabbi, suspecting a trap, answered him with a verse from Ecclesiastes: "Curse not the king, no not in thy thought . . . for a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter."

An understandably prudent reply, for this king, so anxious to know his subjects' opinions, had set up a network of secret police to ferret them out. He was also a man whose actions were quite contrary to his promises. Ostensibly he respected and encouraged the Jewish religion, in accord with his Roman masters—did not Augustus contribute personally to the support of the Temple at Jerusalem?—but at night he was known to have forced his way into the tomb of David and robbed it for its treasures.

The people knew little of the details of government or of the exact nature of the ties between Palestine and the Roman Empire. But ignorant as they were of

politics, a king was a king, and they heard talk about him. Rumor, which in Semitic countries is so quick to spread and so easily distorted, held Herod responsible for all the griefs of the Jewish country people, including those of Nazareth. Poverty, heavy taxes and the petty annoyances imposed by the bureaucracy and the police, all these things were blamed no more on the Romans than on their royal collaborator. Doubtless no one in Nazareth had ever seen him in person. But his name served as a personification (a device particularly necessary to the Semites) of evil.

The Nazareth to which Jesus and his family returned possessed nothing remotely resembling a theological school or a political institution. Religion, naïvely tied to the sanctified land, was the most powerful force, and the only outside news was that brought by the "bird of the air," in other words by rumor. What a contrast between these two factors of everyday life; the one a product of the land's natural evolution, the other imposed by a foreign power to which the puppet king was subservient!

A tradition, an invasion—there was a mutual play of influences between them. Herod, the incarnation of evil, was not merely a commonplace tyrant; he was the servant of idolaters whose overwhelming material power was imposed upon a nation dedicated to the one true God.

And so Palestine's struggle to escape from the Roman yoke can be considered from two angles. It could have been political and military, as the Zealots (forerunners of the "underground") conceived it, or spiritual and

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pacifist (relying on ideas rather than weapons), as exemplified in the Pharisees.

When Jesus returned to Nazareth he was only a small child, far from the age when he must make a choice between them. And Joseph, the head of the family, was more anxious to get on with his carpentry business than to concern himself with politics. It was by making yokes and ploughshares that he could best serve God. But in the course of the hidden years, Jesus must have had to face the problems of his country and of his times, problems common to many later countries and times as well. As a small child, in 6 A.D., he may have heard of the revolt of Judas of Gamala, known as the "Galilean," which caused considerable commotion before the Romans finally put it down. He had, during his first twelve years, to learn to feel like a Jew, to understand all the implications of Judaism. And when he went, at twelve years of age, to Jerusalem, it was not only, as Saint Luke tells us, to meet the doctors, but also to make his first contact with the power of Rome and the Jews who supported it. This was doubtless a decisive moment of his spiritual development.

A tradition, an invasion . . . that is, a land historically impregnated by God, and a group of men from another country who temporarily occupied it. From their meeting, and its effect on the mind of a predestined Jewish child, came the gravest crisis—still unresolved—through which humanity has ever passed.

Two years after Jesus' birth, at about the time when

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he returned to Nazareth, the seventy-year-old Herod the Great, loaded with wealth and honors, died.

## 2.

### Learning a Language and a Trade

UP TO Jesus' thirteenth year we know almost nothing, at least officially, about him. But there is room for conjecture. We know nothing of his joys and sorrows, his childhood diseases and the other petty events of his early years. The little we do know concerns his professional apprenticeship.

For Joseph, who was by family tradition a carpenter, initiated him to the same trade. This was not simply on account of a parent's natural wish to assure his son's future and the satisfaction of seeing him follow in his footsteps. There was a religious reason as well. To the Jews of the Bible and to all those who even today are faithful to their tradition, manual labor, and indeed all labor, is sacred. "He who works for a living is greater than he who shuts himself up in idle piety," say the rabbis. And, even more precisely: "An artisan at his work does not need to defer to the greatest of doctors."

Even the rabbis were enjoined to work. "Master some trade outside of your studies," says the rabbinical comment on Ecclesiastes, and the Talmud stresses the fact that work has a higher place than even religious practices. "He who makes himself useful by work is greater than he who knows God." And intellectual work is not what is intended. "The best work is that connected with the land," says the Talmud, "even if it is not the most profitable it is to be preferred to all others."

The wise men of Israel, both before and after Jesus, have carried out these commands. Hillel was a woodcutter, Rabbi Yehuda a baker, Rabbi Johanan a cobbler. Even Saul of Tarsus, before he became Saint Paul, was a tentmaker.

But it is not enough to exercise a trade; a man must hand it down to his son. Here, too, the Talmud is unequivocal. "Just as it is necessary to feed one's son, so it is necessary to teach him a manual trade." And again, in stronger terms; "A man who does not teach his son a trade is making him into a thief."

We can see now why Joseph made Jesus his apprentice, doubtless at a very early age, and why, over a century later, Saint Justin affirmed that he had heard mention in Palestine of ploughs from Joseph's workshop, made by Jesus' hand. For the first twelve of the hidden years, before the journey to Jerusalem, this is the only fact we really know, although it does not appear in any of the Gospel stories.

Let us go on, now, to conjectures. If we know that a man was born in New York, Moscow, Paris or New Delhi, it is easy enough for us to guess at his language,

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his culture and even his religion. For the child Jesus the same thing holds true. There are two consequences, apparently obvious and commonplace, of the fact that he was born a Jew: he spoke a Semitic language and he practiced the religion of Israel.

Jesus' mother-tongue was Aramaic, a language different from Hebrew, but fairly close to it, which for three centuries had taken its place in Palestine. Hebrew and Aramaic were as close as, in our day, French and Italian. Just as these are both Latin languages, based on the same mental make-up, so Hebrew and Aramaic were two Semitic tongues, with the same relationship between words and ways of thinking and easily translatable one to the other.

Later on, as an adult, Jesus was to live in a trilingual society, not unlike that of North Africa today, where Moslem intellectuals, of Semitic origin, have Arabic as a literary language, Berber for everyday use and French for cultural exchanges. Jesus was familiar with traditional Hebrew and everyday Aramaic and probably had a smattering of Greek and Latin, the latter the country's official tongue. When he was nailed to the cross a sign carrying inscriptions in Greek, Latin and Hebrew was placed over his head.

His immediate task, then, was to learn Aramaic, and we must not underestimate the influence of this Semitic language upon his mental processes. The first characteristic which must have impressed itself upon him was its repugnance to abstraction. Every Semitic word is tied to two concrete realities: the reality of the mouth which

pronounces it and the reality of the object which it designates.

The syllables by which the child learned to read were quite different from those which would be set before him today. In a contemporary primer vowels and consonants are presented on the same footing, each with an equal role to play. Consonants direct and articulate the breath, but if they were alone they would be unpronounceable, either too guttural or too whistling, in either case too close to mere noise to be read aloud. Vowels provide pauses; they contribute intonation and serve to infuse with thought and to orchestrate the primitive themes of the voice.

But the scrolls of the Torah from which Jesus learned to read were a very different affair. When he went to the *bet ha-sefer*, or kindergarten of his day, there was no question of learning to read or write vowels; for as long as five or six centuries after his birth they were simply not written. Even the Tetragrammaton, the incommutable, four-letter, sacred name of Jahweh, before which Jesus, like every Jewish child, covered his eyes with his hand, was composed of only consonants. But of course every Jew had heard the Torah long before he saw it, and its verses were familiar to him by ear rather than by eye. His reading was guided by the framework of consonants, with the missing vowel sounds supplied by memory and tradition.

After syllables came words. These too were down-to-earth in such a way as to confirm the healthy ingenuousness of a child. There was a strict minimum of adjectives, which in more evolved languages weaken

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the noun. Such adjectives as there were expressed elementary qualities such as a child could grasp, because he saw them around him. Big (*gedol*), little (*katan*), heavy (*kaved*), wise (*hakam*), every child has seen objects or persons thus described in his family life and during his initiation to the outside world. More subtle concepts were expressed by complementary nouns, so that in every sentence the substantive was sovereign. Holy place was place of holiness; eternal home, home of eternity; royal race, race of royalty; merciful kings, kings of mercy. In all these expressions there is a certain primitive character, but for this very reason they sank deeply into the consciousness of a child growing up in a faraway time and place and made him directly aware of the nature of human thoughts and emotions.

There was a paucity, too, of degrees of comparison, of the comparatives and superlatives and also of adverbs, of all the parts of speech which so often make for verbal inflation. Why use a roundabout expression to designate the holiest part of the Temple of Jerusalem, when it can so succinctly and effectively be called *kedosh hakedoshim*, the Holy of Holies? Why speak of the best or most beautiful of songs instead of the Song of Songs? Was not Mary more touched by the Angel Gabriel's telling her that she was "blessed among women," than if he had called her the happiest woman on earth? There are overtones of Semitic simplicity even in the Greek of the Gospel according to Saint Luke.

In any case, the vocabulary which Jesus learned at home or in the *bet ha-sefer* was stripped down to essentials, to the nouns which initiate an act and the

verbs which accomplish it. The language is devoid of artificial subtleties and expressive of naïve faith; indeed, it has been called the language of God and that of God's poets and prophets. There are two categories of persons to whom it is utterly unsuited: philosophers and technocrats, for it cannot be adapted to either dialectics or mathematical speculations.

Jesus' direct contact with Semitic patterns of thought caused him to understand quite effortlessly certain expressions which we, with our Latin heritage, have misinterpreted. Take, for instance, the famous law of retaliation: "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth," which shocks us because we have accepted it, quite literally, as meaning that evil should be returned with evil. This is, of course, an error, based on our ignorance of the peculiar qualities of the Semitic languages. First of all, retaliation is a legal, not a moral measure. Second, the Jew of Jesus' time, and Jesus himself, recoiled from abstraction and had no legal vocabulary. We cannot imagine them leafing through a penal code in order to find a penalty, general or particular; such procedure is remote from the spirit of the parables. The fact is that the Jews spoke in concrete metaphors, of which this is one. "An eye for an eye," does not mean that a man who has torn out the eye of his fellow should have his own torn out in return; this would be contrary to the Jewish law of loving one's neighbor as one's self and having mercy on one's enemy. It is a typically Semitic metaphor, meaning that there is an appropriate punishment for every crime, the loss of an eye being certainly graver than that of a tooth. Here we have nothing pitiless. Is it not the

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custom in every civilized country to fit the punishment to the crime? With his Semitic background Jesus could not have found this so very shocking.

The Talmud, which, as we shall see later, was already in the process of formation in Jesus' time, gives a subtle and slightly ironical reply to Latinized commentators on the law of retaliation.

Rabbi Simeon ben Johai says: "An eye for an eye" refers to a pecuniary punishment, that is the payment of a sum of money equivalent to the damage done. And why not retaliation in the literal sense of the word, that is, the infliction of the same damage in return? Because this would lead to all sorts of inequity. If a one-eyed man were to tear out one eye of his fellow, then he would completely lose his sight in return. And what punishment are we to inflict on a blind man who is guilty of this same crime?

This is a humorous and conclusive example of how not to interpret a Semitic metaphor. To Jesus its meaning would have been perfectly clear.

Another contemporary error, of which he would never have been the victim, is in the interpretation of the phrase "vanity of vanities," as modern languages have translated one of the opening verses of Ecclesiastes. How abstract is this translation! It becomes a philosopher or a theologian, and neither one existed in the Nazareth of Jesus' time.

The Hebrew term is quite different from its Latin equivalent; it is the very concrete noun *hevel*, which

means wind, breath, steam, or vapor, so that *hevel havah-lim* signifies “vapor of or from vapors.”

Here is the intimate and graphic explanation given by the *midrash*, which Joseph might have passed on to Mary and Jesus, on one of those afternoons of the Sabbath day, dedicated to meditation of the Scriptures.

*The vapor which rises from a cauldron of boiling water is not “vapor of vapors”; it is the vapor of the liquid from which it is distilled. But let us imagine seven cauldrons, one on top of another, with only the bottom one full of water. The vapor rising from this bottom cauldron will progressively lose substance as it mounts from one level to another, until finally it seems to be held up by other gusts of vapors. Then, and then only, we may call it “vapor of vapors.”*

Let us go on from here to interpret the metaphor by the traditional Jewish method. The farther that intangible, vaporous thing, conscience, travels away from the God that made it, the more prone it is to the feeling of futility and despair described by the author of *Ecclesiastes*.

In the house at Nazareth, where he acquired his first notions of the world and of God, Jesus must have learned through images and analogies of just this kind. To a modern man, brought up on the rationalism of Aristotle and Descartes, such unabstract, down-to-earth reasoning seems on the one hand extraordinarily poetical and free, on the other bewildering and terrifying. Without our grammatical rules, our dialectical formulas,

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our geometrical logic, we are like snails without a shell.

But the Jew of Jesus' time had no such feeling of insecurity. The simple, ingenuous world, to which Hebrew and Aramaic furnished him the key, had a coherent meaning all its own, different from ours, but no less valid. There was no hiatus between objects and words, no metaphysical anxiety brought on by a dissonance between them. If, at a distance of two thousand years, we can have any idea of the use to which Jesus put words, we must be struck by the certainties which they represented to him.

First of all, the name of God, or one of its equivalents, had a terrifying reality and power. God Himself was aware of the import of His holy name and on guard against it. Here, according to the *midrash*, is God's reaction to the words used to designate Him in place of His forbidden name: "If men have invoked my surname as a pretext for killing one another, how much more would they have killed had I revealed my ineffable name?"

What a realistic absence of illusions!

To the Jew of ancient times every proper name was divinely inspired. Before his disobedience Adam was granted the power of giving a name to every living thing, and Moses, upon his ascent to heaven, was supposed to find God weaving wreaths of letters. Names were anchored in reality; they were not, as in our day, merely convenient labels; rather, they expressed the essence of a person or place and determined a destiny. Thus John (Johanan) means "God is gracious"; Emmanuel means

"God is with us"; and Jesus means "Savior." In the book of Genesis, every time a man is born we are told the meaning of his name.

Place names are equally meaningful. Bethany, a town near a place where a boat crossed the River Jordan, means "home of the boat"; the bare rocky height of Golgotha means "cranium"; the garden of Gethsemane an "oil press." Bethlehem originally owed its name to the Babylonian god, Lakhmu, but after the arrival of the Israelites its etymology underwent a change and it came to mean Bet-lehem, or "house of bread."

What security and assurance the harmony between persons and places and their names afforded a child! A universe without flaw or fissure, where reason could never go astray, was opened up before him.

Common nouns, too, had no abstract significance. In a more modern language grammar and rhetoric define the shades of meaning attached to every word. But in a Semitic tongue what matters is the logical content, its power over a man, the emotion it awakens and the atmosphere it creates around him. Ideas far removed from one another intellectually but closely allied on a sentimental plane may inhabit the same word.

Zaddik, the key word of the Jewish moral code, indicates both justice and charity and the inseparable union between them. Sholom, that eternal Jewish aspiration, signifies not only peace, but also happiness and perfection. This variety of meanings may seem to make for logical imprecision. But there are advantages of another kind in the network of affinities and suggestions which enrich a word and push it deep into the con-

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sciousness, where emotion plays a greater part than dictionary definition. A man's inner life is one with his language; at the center of his vocabulary he finds certitude and serenity.

Man is at the center of the universe as well; even Hebrew syntax contributes to this impression. In Latin, for instance, there is a genitive case to indicate possession—*domus patris*, the father's house—in which the possessor rather than the object possessed is inflected. This is tantamount to considering the object the stable element of the two and man the variable. In biblical Hebrew the exact opposite is true. The object involved undergoes a change of case because of being possessed by a man, and the possessor remains unvaried. The house (*bait*) of the father (*ab*) becomes *bet-ab*.

Latin scholars and those brought up on a Latin language are disturbed by this reversal of the genitive, which reflects a mental process diametrically opposite to our own. But if we try to imagine the make-up of a first-century Jew we shall at once realize that there is nothing so startling about it. At the center of his language and his world was man. As a nineteenth-century Jewish thinker, Elie Benamozegh, puts it: "Man is universe made conscious." Was not such a feeling profoundly comforting to a young child?

The vocabulary which Jesus learned as a child was, then, very close to life; it took now a human, now a divine turn, but was never shut up in theoretical concepts. It may have been somewhat fuzzy at the edges, but this was because it had the elasticity of real life, which is not always rational.

Let us pass, now, from substantives to verbs, notoriously a difficult part of any language. The way they were conjugated in the age of Jesus was equally revealing of the Jewish spirit. First of all, the Semitic verbal system does not hinge on time. To a Westerner this may seem disconcerting, but to a Semite it is another means of feeling at ease in the universe. "To primitive man," says Lévy-Bruhl, "time is not, as it is to us, a sort of intellectualized intuition, an 'order of succession.' It is felt rather than plotted." The Talmud itself says that there is no before and no after.

In other words, time's value is not absolute; it depends upon the man that animates it. Time does not shut him in or obsess him; rather, it holds him up, as a bird is held up by air and a fish by water. Both these elements flow first in one direction and then in another. Why, then, should time be a one-way street? Semitic verbs do not merely recount a fact or an action; they may also express an order, a prohibition, or a condition such as doubt or desire. In grammatical terms a verb may be hortatory, optative, and so on; rarely is it a plain indicative. All these are abstract ways of stating what Jesus instinctively felt, what the Jews of his time knew, if not in fact, then by intuition: that time can be measured only by the impulsion given it by man, that it has no fixed value outside his experience of it.

None of this is very Cartesian. The time we have been discussing is not the geometrical framework in which for two thousand years man has noted the stages of his technical progress and his spiritual decline. For a Jew of Biblical times this humanization of time was in harmony

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with a deep and intimate feeling which may have weakened him in regard to the Romans but strengthened him in his own conscience and before God.

Let us look at the *midrashim*, or rabbinical commentaries, and the Talmud whose accumulated wisdom and allegory surrounded Jesus when he was a child. Here the chronology of the world appears to have been foreordained by God and yet at the same time dependent upon man. Doubtless the all-knowing Creator knew from the time of Genesis what would be the decisive moments of the evolution of the universe and of the destiny of Israel, which was its focus. But the dates of these events were subject to modification by the merits and faults of man. God had originally meant to reveal the Torah, or Law, only to the thousandth generation after the Creation, leaving mankind time to attain perfection on its own initiative, to discover by its own experience the as yet unformulated precepts of His wisdom. But His optimism soon proved to be unfounded. Instead of seeking the revelation of the Law, man seemed to be intent upon evading it. Adam disobeyed, Cain killed, and the human race was corrupted, as in Sodom and Gomorrah. Even the patriarchs, one *midrash* of the time of Jesus tells us, were disappointing. Abraham doubted God's promises; Isaac continued to love his son, Esau, whom God had condemned for his violence, thus showing himself unfaithful to Him; Jacob, according to the prophet Isaiah, accused God of failing to reward his merits, which was tantamount to rebellion.

After such reprehensible behavior on the part of the best of His children, God feared that mankind would fall

into further corruption and chose to reveal the Law not to the thousandth but to the twenty-sixth generation. (There were ten generations between Adam and Noah, ten between Noah and Abraham and six between Abraham and Moses.) If the order of events in time can be thus influenced by man, why should not verb tenses also undergo alteration? This is what a young Jew learns from the study of the conjugations. In a Latin language we find present, future and past tenses, each of them referring to a well-defined segment of time. But the quite different viewpoint of Hebrew grammar is illustrated in two examples of words attributed to God in person.

First, there is the midrash account of God's revelation of Himself, through Moses, to the Children of Israel: "The Holy One, blessed be his name, said to Moses: 'Tell them that I was, that I am and that I shall be.'" In the Hebrew, the three tenses are one, the imperfect; in the English of the King James Version, this is translated as a present: "I am that I am" (Exodus, 3:15).

When after Moses' death, God confirmed His promises regarding the Children of Israel to Joshua, his successor, He used the tenses in an even more confusing way. "Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses." (Joshua, 1:3.) In the Hebrew the first of the three verbs is an imperfect and the last two are perfects. To us the sequence of tenses is puzzling, but to Jesus and his contemporaries it was perfectly clear. The perfect and imperfect do not refer to a definite moment of time, but to its movement. To the Biblical Jew, and perhaps to

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the modern Arab as well, it does not matter at what moment an action took place, but only whether or not it has been accomplished. The Semitic languages demand of a verb only that it mark the difference between finished and unfinished business. The flow of time is what counts, not its successive stages. When God proclaimed His existence or renewed a promise to Joshua, He did not think in calendar terms, but simply inscribed Himself in duration, on a basis of relativity akin to that discovered by the Jewish-born Bergson in our own day. The Hebrew imperfect is applied to a continuing, that is "open" action, the perfect to one that is finished and "closed." In the verse from Joshua, the phrase "every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon" refers to an action that may be repeated any number of times but never be finished; God's promise to Moses and Joshua, on the other hand, was made once and forever.

By these and many other similar phrases the Jewish concept of time was impressed upon Jesus' youthful mind. Even if he was unable to put it into words he was instinctively aware of the difference between the finished and the unfinished. Of course we cannot follow the exact course of his mental development. First, because he was Jesus, and his mission, whether we look on it as human or divine, surpasses our understanding; second, because he was a child and the origin of a child's thoughts are mysterious to us, and third, because he was a Palestinian Jew whose mental process had an empirical character quite different from our own.

But even if we cannot follow the development we

can see the end result. Jesus, along with the other Jews of his time, had an idea of time which may still be found today in isolated Jewish communities. The theologian, Abraham Heschel, tells us that until the nineteenth century the Ashkenazi Jews of Central Europe retained the Biblical concept of time. To them the present moment knew no limits but was part of a continuum stretching from the beginning to the end of time, that is, from the Creation to the advent of the Messiah. Their life was not led on a chronological basis, for the patriarchs, kings and prophets of the Old Testament were always at their side. They believed themselves to be living in the past of Israel and at the same time in its future.

At the Passover feast, the Seder, which Jesus celebrated first under its Jewish name and then as the Last Supper, everyone present considers himself as one of those freed from bondage in Egypt, as an incarnation of the past. At the same time he represents the future; there is a place left empty at the table for the prophet of the Messiah, Elijah.

The whole of Jewish worship is a reconstruction of history. On the feast of Purim, for instance, the children in the synagogue stamp their feet at the name of Haman, as if he were still alive or only just killed, and in so doing they think of all the persecutors still in the limbo of the future, waiting to play their role of murderers and then, like him, to perish. Not so very long ago Hitler was in their mind. So it is that for a Jew every fleeting moment has something of the savor of eternity. Present, past and future run together, and in their meet-

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ing the present does not play a part of mere regret or expectation; it is, on the contrary, the link by which history is made to remain alive, by which the future is present before it has arrived and the past lives after it has gone by. There is a curious *midrash* concerning a certain Rabbi Lieber's vision of the prophet Elijah, which emphasizes the importance of the present. "It is not Rabbi Lieber who is privileged to have a revelation of Elijah, but Elijah who is privileged to have a revelation of Rabbi Lieber."

Among all the fugitive moments in which eternity dwells, the most organic, the most holy, is that of the consecrated rest of the Sabbath, or seventh day, which provides a framework for the Jewish notion of time. Abraham Heschel says:

Jewish tradition offers us no definition of the concept of eternity, it tells us how to experience the taste of eternity or eternal life within time. Eternal life does not grow away from us; it is 'planted within us,' growing beyond us. The world to come is therefore not only a posthumous condition, dawning upon the soul on the morrow after its departure from the body. The essence of the world to come is Sabbath eternal, and the seventh day in time is an example of eternity.

When syntax first introduced into the Jewish make-up a distinction between the finished and the unfinished, there were serious cultural as well as religious consequences. From a religious point of view it showed that, for the Jews, time is almost sacred, or at least that it

belongs to the sanctified universe of the Bible and of Jesus. Sacred because it is the crucible where God's eternity meets the temporality of man. Sacred also because, in its differentiation between the finished and the unfinished, there is the basis of Messianism—of the accomplishment, unaccomplished yet constantly sought, a concept which Israel was the first to make the motive power of human progress, and one which Jesus must have absorbed from his earliest years.

Culturally, this distinction is the basis for the clash between the Semitic and Roman worlds, in which Jesus, during the years of his ministry, played so large a part, in which he physically succumbed, only to win an eventual spiritual victory. This clash was not a purely political affair, between an empire and its satellite; it was the conflict between two cultures, two conceptions of life.

For the Romans and all those who have undergone their influence, "time is an instrument of measure rather than life's domain." But for Jesus and the Jews it is the very stuff of life, upon which man can embroider the pattern of his days. For the Romans and the technocrats who are their spiritual descendants, the purpose of culture is to conquer space and to subordinate time to spatial categories. But for Jesus and the Jews of his time, the purpose of all spiritual endeavor was to sanctify time. Abraham Heschel goes on:

*We all of us live in time, indeed we identify ourselves with it so closely that we are unable to observe it with detachment. The world of space is all around us, but it contains nothing so indispensable that we cannot do with-*

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out it; in fact, we are quite free to change our spatial situation. Existence does not imply any spatial power, but to the years of our life we give overwhelming importance. Time is the only thing we really possess, and so naturally that unless we make an effort we are not aware of it. Our journey is in time, which flows like a mighty river, with familiar objects represented by the shore.

Such may have been the first impression which the Semitic world made upon the child Jesus' mind. It is likely that the Semitic idea of time had an important part in determining his spiritual progress. Indeed, it may have been a factor in the later antagonism between Jesus and the Romans and the Romanized Jews, their collaborators, who judged him at Jerusalem. This conflict between the Semitic and Roman worlds is the dramatic background out of which Christianity was born.

# 3.

## Jesus in the Synagogue

**I**N THE Nazareth of Jesus' time there were doubtless Jews both faithful and faithless. Israel, the nation chosen by God to incarnate His will, has always been a people of priests and a people of unbelievers. The strength of the two groups may vary, but they have existed, side by side, from the beginning, combatting but at the same time stimulating and staving up each other.

Was Joseph, the head of the family into which Jesus was born, one of those who serve God by their obedience or of those who by their defiance challenge Him to make Himself known? Did he love and fear God and strive to carry out all the *mitzvot*, or commandments of the Law, or did he go to the synagogue only on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, and, in spite of the rabbi's exhortations, stay away until the following year?

We have every reason to believe that Joseph and

## *61. Jesus in the Synagogue*

Mary were practicing Jews. Their annual trip to Jerusalem and their contribution to the treasury of the Temple show that they made a particular effort to follow the precepts of their religion. Saint Luke tells us that after Jesus was born Mary observed the rite of purification, according to the law of Moses. She and Joseph took the child to Jerusalem to consecrate him to the Lord, and following the orders of Leviticus they made an offering of two turtledoves. We have no reason to doubt their piety.

We may imagine, then, that Joseph carried out the prescriptions of the Law not only in the synagogue but in his own house as well. On the doorpost of his modest dwelling there was a mezuzah, a roll of parchment inside a metal tube, on it the fundamental Jewish prayer, the Shema: "Shema, Israel, Adonai elohenu, Adonai ehad (Hear, O Israel; the Lord our God, the Lord is one.)" This meant that the house was consecrated, in obedience to the injunction found in Deuteronomy:

. . . These words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart:

And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.

And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes.

And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates.

Hence the mezuzah on the doorpost, the phylacteries worn on the forehead and the back of the left hand and the daily recital of the above verses. Joseph practiced other domestic rites as well. For one thing, he ate kosher food. In the acts of the Apostles, 10:14, Saint Peter tells us: "I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean." Since Saint Peter must often have taken meals at Jesus' side we may deduce that Jesus too observed the dietary laws. Some of these may be attributed to sanitary considerations, such as the prohibition of pork, quite natural in a hot country. But others have a religious origin. The ban against eating the sciatic nerve of any slaughtered animal comes from the fact that Jacob was wounded in this part when he wrestled with the angel. As for the taboo on blood, this is straight from Leviticus, 17:14:

*For it is the life of all flesh; the blood of it is for the life thereof; therefore I said unto the children of Israel Ye shall eat the blood of no manner of flesh; for the life of all flesh is the blood thereof: whosoever eateth it shall be cut off.*

Wine, too, is the object of ritual prescriptions. Kosher wine is no different from any other, but every hand that has touched it, from that of the grape picker to that of the bottler, is a Jewish hand. Under these conditions wine is not only drunk, informally, at every meal, but it serves also for the Kiddush or blessing with which the head of the family pays homage at the beginning of every Sabbath to the Eternal:

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Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who createst the fruit of the vine.

The child Jesus also wore the clothing prescribed by the Law. After he was three years old his coat bore the *sisit*, or fringe, ordained in Deuteronomy, 22:12: "Thou shalt make thee fringes upon the four quarters of thy vesture."

Food and clothing, these two fundamentals of a child's early years, were impregnated, in the young Jesus' eyes, with a religious meaning which transcended and transfigured their mere everyday function. Another thing which sanctified the life of the humble house was an abundance of benedictions.

Every action, no matter how commonplace, called forth Joseph's blessing. We must remember that the Jewish world is completely sacred; even its most earthy aspects are joined to the divine, and if a man is to participate in this mixed natural and supernatural order he must, in every passing circumstance, praise the Lord.

"Whosoever enjoys some pleasure of the senses without offering a benediction," says the Talmud, "commits a sacrilegious theft against God."

The *berakhah*, or benediction, is the ever reforged tie which binds us to God. "The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof," according to Psalm 24:1, but when consecrated by a benediction it becomes man's privilege to enjoy it. Hence the ritual form of every blessing, which must invoke both the name of God and the attribute to His kingship. Every blessing begins with the same words: "Baruk atta Adonai, Eloheinu melek ha-olam: Praised be

thou, O Lord our God, Ruler of the Universe . . ." Hence, also, the number and variety of benedictions. Every casual event, every voluntary action is an occasion to thank God, to praise and glorify Him. For the course of an ordinary day the sages of Israel have set up a hundred benedictions which every Jew ought to pronounce between the rising and the setting of the sun. "Like the hundred sockets which held up the sanctuary in the wilderness, so the hundred daily *berakhot* hold up the sanctuary of our life."

So it is that as soon as he wakes up the Jew blesses God who, in the words of the psalm, "stretched out the earth above the waters"; he blesses Him while getting dressed; as he laces his shoes he praises Him for having "supplied me with every want," and as he puts on his belt he calls upon the Eternal who "girded Israel with might." This benediction, like many others, has an allegorical meaning. In buckling a belt to hold up our lower garments we not only recall our double nature but, as Elias Munk says, "we hide our lower organs from the sight of the nobler ones above, in order that we may the more easily drive all impure thoughts from our minds."

A benediction for every meal, a benediction for going to bed, a benediction for even the humblest bodily functions, which in this way are tied up with the order of the universe.

"Praised be thou, O Lord our God, Ruler of the Universe who hast formed man in wisdom and created many orifices . . . who healest all flesh."

And, on a higher plane, a benediction upon God for

## 65. *Jesus in the Synagogue*

having given us the Law, for having allowed us to participate in the Covenant:

“Praised be thou, Eternal Ruler of the Universe, who hast not made me a heathen.”

A blessing for liberty:

“Praised be thou, O Lord God, Ruler of the Universe, who hast not made me a slave.”

A blessing for that orderliness of the world in which even animals participate:

“Praised be thou, O Lord God, Ruler of the Universe, who hast given the cock intelligence to distinguish between night and day.”

If the sun is out, God is to be blessed for its beneficent rays; if there are thunder and lightning, He is to be thanked for safekeeping and if it rains, for the benefit to the crops.

And so benedictions followed the child Jesus all through the day, and within the confines of his family's house he was made aware of a whole universe dedicated to God. Every one of his thoughts and acts was colored by a consciousness of divinity. The intimacy with God which he acquired with his first stammered words, his earliest awakening to the world, would never desert him. And when, for the first time, Joseph took him by the hand and led him to the house of prayer, the synagogue, he entered upon the discovery of still more ties with the divine.

Jesus' first entrance into the synagogue of Nazareth was the encounter of the founder of a new religion with

the practices of one already old, which have remained practically the same up to the present day. A contemporary Christian, visiting a synagogue, would hear many of the prayers with which Jesus was familiar.

The synagogue is a house not only of prayer but of study; in the Jewish communities of Alsace it is commonly called "school." Often the Law is taught in a room adjoining that used for the divine service. But the synagogue is not a sanctuary. The Temple of Jerusalem, even after its destruction, is the only place entitled to this name. The synagogue, by its half sacred, half secular character, symbolizes the paradox of Israel, a people chosen by God and yet living in the world in the same way as any other.

In its lack of ritual and clericalism the synagogue is a specifically Jewish institution. It is a body of believers gathered together to pray and learn, without benefit of clergy, since any one of its members can officiate on behalf of the rest. The rabbi is not a professional priest, but a man who loves God and has studied his Law; he watches over the service but does not conduct it alone. He may explain the Scriptures from the pulpit, but any member of his congregation, or even a visitor, is empowered to do the same thing. Nothing distinguishes him from the rest of the faithful; the *tallith*, or prayer shawl, confers no rank upon him, but is merely the garment which he puts on as they do, for the sake of reverence, in addressing a public prayer to God. The service is simply an act of worship, performed by men meeting as friends or neighbors together. We know from the Gospels that Jesus often condemned the Jewish ritualism of his time.

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But he attacked practices of the Temple at Jerusalem, not of the local synagogue.

For it was in the synagogue that he was initiated into Jewish life and then, over a period of thirty years, felt the ripening of his predestined vocation. In the synagogue, likewise, after his ministry had begun, he delivered his personal interpretation of the Law and clashed with the Pharisees. It was to the Pharisees, however, that the synagogue owed its development, and the synagogue, during periods of persecution and dispersion, preserved the Jews' monotheistic heritage from destruction. Later, it served as a model for the first Christian communities and continued to exist, with unabated vitality, until our own day.

For the synagogue, or rather the synagogues, are quite separate from the Temple of Jerusalem; over the centuries they have alternately supplemented and replaced it. Jewish tradition takes the synagogue all the way back to Mount Sinai. As soon as Moses came down with the Ten Commandments there was a beginning of the teaching of the Law. The Shema enjoins the teaching of the Torah, and this can only mean that every Jewish community should have a meeting place and hence a synagogue.

The Temple held a different and unique place in the story of the Jewish people. It was served by a clerical hierarchy, composed not of rabbis but of priests. Here were offered up the sacrifices which the synagogues did no more than gather together or else replace by prayers; here was the seat of the supreme religious authority. The synagogues, on the other hand, were more like parochial

associations, which held to the fundamental dogma but enjoyed considerable organizational autonomy. The majesty of the Temple and of its ceremonies was in sharp contrast to the rustic simplicity of the synagogues. Obviously there was no rivalry between them, but during the periods when the Temple did not exist the synagogues, less conspicuous and hence less vulnerable, served as repositories of the Jewish faith, and by their very nature they promoted individual prayer rather than elaborate ceremony.

It was between 587 and 539 b.c., during the Jews' Babylonian exile, that the synagogues first assumed importance. As Edmond Fleg says, "they took the place of the destroyed Temple and sponsored a religious life based on prayer rather than on sacrifice." The synagogues developed, from then on, in periods of persecution and dispersion, the two fatally recurrent conditions of Israel's existence.

In the fourth century b.c., when the Jewish nation was once more gathered together and the Temple rebuilt, Ezra, Nehemiah and other sages of the time reorganized Jewish worship. They emphasized the study of the Torah and the role of prayer, as the synagogues had developed them. And so, in spite of the reconstruction of the Temple, the synagogues continued to flourish, and soon every village had one of its own. Even in Jerusalem itself there were variously estimated to be between 384 and 480 synagogues. Their function was so different from that of the Temple that there was one within the Temple itself, in the *Lishkath ha-gazith*, or Chamber of Hewn Stone, where the Sanhedrin assembled. Here the

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form of worship was composed entirely of the prayers which in the Temple were pronounced only between sacrifices. The reading of the Law took place not only in the sacred language of Hebrew, but also in the spoken tongue, Aramaic. In the shadow of the newly rebuilt sanctuary, which was doomed soon to fall again, the synagogue represented the permanence of the personal and intimate religious feeling of the Jewish people. The Pharisees, who were its sponsors, had little in common with the more ritualistic sect of the Sadducees, from whose numbers came most of the professional clergy.

So we may imagine Joseph, leading Jesus to the synagogue school, or *Bet ha-keneset*, as it is called in Hebrew. This was a bare, rectangular room, with no decorative motif other than the Star of David or the seven-branched candlestick (really a lamp), since the representation of the divinity was forbidden. The only pieces of furniture were those used for worship. First, against one of the shorter sides of the rectangle, the Ark (*Aron Hakodesh*) containing the scroll of the Torah (*Sepher Torah*). This was several steps above the floor, and on the top step there was a reading desk, the *tebah*, at which the officiant took his place in order to say his prayers face to face with the word of God. In the center of the room there was a platform, known as the *bimah* or *almemor*, where the scroll of the Law was taken to be read aloud.

The faithful sat on benches, facing the Ark which was orientated toward the Temple of Jerusalem. Before the Ark there was a perpetually burning lamp, emblem of the spiritual light which God sheds upon man. And inside, as we have said before, the *Sepher Torah*, the

parchment scroll on which a scribe (*sopher*) had copied the text of the Pentateuch. Every time, in the course of his copying, that he came to the name of God he interrupted his work to say: "I shall consecrate my writing to the holiness of God's name." Certain scribes were so scrupulous that they took a ritual bath in order to purify the hand with which they held the pen.

The Sepher Torah was rolled around two wooden sticks, each with disks at top and bottom, in whose grooves were inscribed the names of both the donor and the scribe. It was wrapped in a precious cloth bearing the image of the Lion of Judah or the Seal of Solomon and the words: "The Crown of the Torah," and protected by a silver plaque, the *tas*. At the most solemn moment of a Sabbath or Holy Day service, the officiant removed the Torah from the Ark and, followed by the notables of the congregation, carried it through the synagogue. The faithful crowded around, touching the precious cloth with a corner of their prayer shawls and then kissing the corner. During the procession tiny silver bells were hung from the upper disks of the sticks holding the scroll, reminiscent of the bells which decked the high priest's robes during a ceremony at the Temple. Another ritual object was the *yad*, a sculptured hand at the end of a rod, which served the reader of the *parashah*, or text for the day, as a pointer. The removal of the Torah from the Ark and its replacement therein were accompanied by chanting in which the whole congregation took part.

This was the simple but impressive ceremony by which every Jew was made familiar with the Law of God. And it was to a synagogue such as the one we have

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just described that Joseph introduced Jesus as a young child. In all likelihood he took him there at least three times a week: on the Sabbath (Friday evening and Saturday) and on the two other days—Monday and Thursday—when the Torah was read. And, of course, on the great traditional holidays, the anniversaries which are a compendium of Jewish theology. Passover, the first day of the religious year, commemorative of the Children of Israel's deliverance from Egypt; Rosh Hashana, the Feast of Trumpets, anniversary of the Creation, and civil New Year's Day; Yom Kippur, the dusk-to-dusk day of atonement, when, until he was thirteen years old, Jesus fasted only half as long as the adults; and also on the feasts of Shavuot (Weeks) or Pentecost, commemorative of the gift of the Law; and Succot (Tabernacles), Thanksgiving. Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles were originally agrarian festivals, since Passover marked (in the Holy Land's hot climate) the beginning of the harvest, Pentecost its end and Tabernacles the gathering-in of the grapes for wine. They still have vestiges of their rustic character.

We can imagine Joseph, on his bench, putting on his prayer shawl for the reading of the Law, but otherwise simply dressed in his best clothes. His head was covered, in order to show his respect and fear of the Lord, but also as a mark of the special destiny God gave to Israel by "crowning it with glory." Beside him sat the child Jesus, also with covered head, attentive at some moments to what was going on but at others, like his contemporaries, wearied by the interminable length of prayers said in a language, Hebrew, which he did not yet

know. On the Sabbath, when Joseph, with his prayer shawl over his head, was called to the Torah to read the *parashah* for the week, Jesus opened his eyes wide and sat proudly next to the seat left empty beside him. But at other times, with some mischievous boys of his own age, he slipped out from among the adults and went to play on the steps of the *tebah*. At his quieter moments he dreamed, perhaps, of the day of his religious coming-of-age, of his thirteenth birthday and bar-mitzvah, when he would be empowered to publicly read the Sabbath service from beginning to end.

The village house of prayer had, then, an atmosphere almost as intimate as that of his own home, and even if he did not know the meaning of all the Hebrew words, their sound was familiar to him. The song of the birds and the smell of the fields, wafted through the wide-open doors, took the place of organ and incense respectively. Behind him, in the space set aside for the women, he could see Mary, his mother.

The regular weekly service began quite simply, when one of those present put on his prayer shawl and mounted the *tebah*. But on more ceremonial occasions there were preliminaries, beginning in the home. Before even setting out for the synagogue the head of the family pronounced this invocation:

"How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, thy tabernacles, O Israel! Through thy great mercy, O God, I come to thy House . . . O Lord, I love the place of thy house and the abode in which thy glory dwelleth. And so I bow down, and adore thee, O God, my Maker . . ."

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Then came the “song of degrees” as he went on:

“My foot standeth in an even place; in the congregations will I bless the Lord.”

And finally the hymn of David:

“But we will bless the Lord from this time forth and for evermore. Praise the Lord.”

The festal service began with the *Barekhu*, the solemn benediction, which is still one of its outstanding points today:

“Praise ye the Lord, to whom all praise is due.

“Praised be the Lord, to whom all praise is due for ever and ever.”

It was a decisive moment in Jesus’ religious career when he began to say Amen. For as the Talmud tells us: “The child wins a part of his future salvation when he learns to say Amen.”

Jesus learned also to distinguish the prayers offered at various hours of the day. There are three separate offices, beginning with that of the twilight (which is when the world was created), known as *Arvit* or *Maariv*, and going on to *Shahrit*, or the office of the dawn, and finally to *Minhah* (literally, offering), the office of the afternoon. According to the Talmud, the morning office was instituted by Abraham, the afternoon one by Isaac, and that of the evening by Jacob.

Among these three patriarchs Abraham is by far the most glorious, or rather the one with the most untarnished glory. “The destiny of Abraham,” says Elias Munk, “is that of a rising and widening light. Possessing every blessing, Abraham stands alone, summoning a

whole world to the altar of the One God. No one looked at him with envy or hatred; indeed, he was venerated as one of God's princes."

Isaac's place is less secure, for he was a solitary man, whose contemporaries were jealous of him, with the result that he was pushed back into himself and his own family. In Isaac was fulfilled God's prophecy to Abraham: "Thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs," which was to be the fate of all Israel.

As for Jacob, his lot was the hardest of all. "His life," says Elias Munk, "was a succession of painful trials. Good fortune smiled on him rarely and never for long."

These three just men, these three *zaddikim*, in spite of their very different lives, all found their way to God through prayer, and this is why they inspire the three offices of the Jewish day. By the same token, each one of these offices has a different tone from the others and represents a particular episode in the drama of the Jewish vocation.

In *Shahrit*, the office of the dawn, commemorative of Abraham, Nature bursts forth in all the brilliance of youth from the shadows of night. With the rising sun man attains fulfillment of his being and of all the possibilities which his freedom allows him. During the night, man, "the earthly master of creation," is bound by the same chains as those of the universe, but every morning he throws them off anew. As the Cabala tells us: "Daytime is the reign of God's love, which gives man full possession of his freedom and resources, in order that, by perfecting himself, he may become an image of God."

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Daytime is the time of God's grace, and in their first prayer the Jews thank him for it.

*Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who hast sanctified us by thy commandments.*

In the evening, on the other hand, man is caught up in darkness, he is the passive victim of the cosmos. A helpless victim of the forces of Nature, he looks not for God's grace but for his mercy. What a contrast there is between the morning and evening prayers! The former is in a key of exultation:

*Blessed is the Lord who is to be blessed for ever and ever.*

*Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who formest light and createst darkness, who makest peace and createst all things:*

*Who in mercy givest light to the earth and to them that dwell thereon, and in thy goodness renewest the creation continually . . .*

*O cause a new light to shine upon Zion, and may we all be worthy soon to enjoy its brightness. Blessed art thou, O Lord, Creator of the luminaries.*

*With abounding love hast thou loved us, O Lord our God, with great and exceeding pity hast thou pitied us. O our Father, our King, for our fathers' sake, who trusted in thee, and whom thou didst teach the statutes of life, be also gracious unto us and teach us . . .*

*Enlighten our eyes in thy Law, and let our hearts*

cleave to thy commandments, and unite our hearts to love and fear thy name, so that we be never put to shame.

Because we have trusted in thy holy, great and revered name, we shall rejoice and be glad in thy salvation."

Whereas the evening prayer expresses resignation and obedience:

Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who at thy word bringest on the evening twilight, with wisdom openest the gates of the heavens, and with understanding changest times and variest the seasons, and arrangest the stars in their watches in the sky, according to thy will. Thou createst day and night; thou rollest away the light from before the darkness, and the darkness from before the light; thou makest the day to pass and the night to approach, and dividest the day from the night, the Lord of Hosts is thy name; a God living and enduring continually, mayest thou reign over us for ever and ever. Blessed art thou, O Lord, who bringest on the evening twilight.

Between these two offices, the awakening to day and the acceptance of night, the afternoon office of *Minhah* has a no less essential role to play. It occurs toward the end of the working day, which may have been fraught with temptation and sin, and constitutes a balancing of accounts whose importance the Talmud particularly stresses. It is when God hears the prayers of the *Minhah* that He decides whether or not a man deserves an an-

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swer to all the hopes, wishes and petitions which he has expressed during the daylight hours. At this time, before night has descended upon him, man seeks to make his peace with God. He offers up the actions of the day, upon whose worthiness depends the tranquility of the night's sleep that lies ahead.

*Shahrit, Minhah, Maariv*, these three groups of prayer, by which, every day, man obeys God and fits himself into the pattern of the universe, must have made Jesus feel that there is no such thing as a profane hour. Just as every spoken word calls up an aspect of God and every accomplished act lights a sacred spark from the matrix of inert Nature, so every minute of the day was sanctified. For Jesus, as for his fellow Jews, every recurrence of the cycle of prayer recalled the intimate bonds between God and His creation, and all the symbolic acts attached to them.

When Moses approached God on Mount Sinai, he passed through three successive zones, of darkness, fog and cloud, symbolized by the three daily offices of Jewish worship and also by the three steps which every Jew takes when he approaches the Shekhina, the divine Presence, the abode of the Most High, and the three backward steps when his prayers are over.

Here we have seen some of the complex feelings which Jesus must have entertained when he entered the synagogue at Joseph's side and waited to hear him pray. The synagogue was a very real, everyday place where he and the other children of his age were alternately attentive or disorderly, murmuring snatches of prayer in a language they did not understand or else scuffling in the

time-honored manner of schoolboys when they are unable to take in what is going on around them. But at the same time the synagogue was a place of transfiguration, where every word had an echo, every motion a reason and every hour some significance. A house for the sanctification of time, a house of study and prayer, where the atmosphere was charged with all the joys and sorrows of life.

Let us imagine the child Jesus emerging from the simplicity of his family life into the mystery of the community religion. At this time he must have experienced and accepted the destiny of Israel's mission.

# 4.

## The Child Jesus before God

T

HE child Jesus, as Saint Luke tells us, "increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man." These words refer to the time when he was twelve years and approaching his religious initiation, the bar-mitzvah, which marked a young Jew's complete admission to the community of Israel. Once this solemnity was accomplished Jesus would be considered an adult; he could count as one of the ten men required to be present at a service in the synagogue. The bar-mitzvah is not a baptism, confirmation or blessing; there is no great mystery about it. When he became thirteen years old, having prepared himself for several months before by learning the appropriate prayers and passages of the Torah, Jesus went to the synagogue, wearing for the first time the tallith or prayer shawl, and for the first time he conducted the Sabbath service. From this time on he was to

take part in Israel's mission and, like every other Jew, to be a priest. For God had said to Moses: "Ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests and an holy nation." (Exodus, 19:5). But his priesthood was to have a lay character, since the synagogue had no clergy.

Jesus was now empowered to "officiate," that is to mount the *tebah*, turn toward the Ark of the Covenant, pronounce benedictions, read the weekly *parashah*, or prescribed passage from the Pentateuch, sing alternate verses of the psalms with the congregation and carry on his youthful shoulders the scroll of the Law in solemn procession. For none of these tasks did he require any special consecration. God's covenant with His people, from the time of Abraham, was an all-sufficient investiture. At the same time, his new position with regard to God in no way took him away from the company of men. Israel had another priest, but the Jewish nation had not lost a lay citizen.

If we knew the exact date of Jesus' birth and hence that of his bar-mitzvah, we could find the passage of the Pentateuch appointed for reading during the week when he mounted the *tebah* for the first time. This might furnish us further clues to his spiritual itinerary. But all we know is the nature of his long preparation for the great day. These fall into two categories of study, which in the Jew's mind are closely akin: the first connected with the history of his people and the second with prayer and the Torah.

The history of Israel is written in the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible, and in Judges, Kings and

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Chronicles, the three most important ones to follow. In the synagogue it is treated in two ways. First, every Saturday there is a reading of the weekly *sidra* or *parashah*. This is a didactic process, which evokes the high points of Israel's story: the Creation, the Flood, the calling of Abraham, the years in Egypt, the Exodus, the passage of the Red Sea, the revelation of Mount Sinai, the promulgation of the Law, the worship of the Golden Calf, the rebellion of Korah and, finally, the last words of Moses and his prophetic benediction. The weekly readings of this story begin with the first chapter of Genesis and end with the last chapter of Deuteronomy, passing through Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers on the way. From century to century the reading has proceeded at a different pace; in our day it takes a little over a year and includes fifty-four *parashiyyot*, but at the time of Jesus it seems that it was divided into 175 episodes and lasted three years. If this is so, then between the ages of five and twelve he would have twice heard the whole cycle, from the creation of Adam to the death of Moses. With every Sabbath the destiny of Israel must have been impressed more deeply upon his mind. Let us look for a moment at the last *parashah*, the farewell to Moses:

*And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face,*

*In all the signs and the wonders, which the Lord sent him to do in the land of Egypt to Pharaoh, and to all his servants and to all his land.*

*And in all that mighty hand, and in all the great terror which Moses shewed in the sight of all Israel.*

Like many another Jew, but perhaps more so, Jesus must have regretted that the story should end here and then start over again. Why not go on? Why should the period after the death of the first prophet and periods still more recent be left out of the weekly commemoration? Was God's time divided into separate zones, with a wall between them? Why not look over the wall and add new chapters to the divine book? Like other Jews animated by the Messianic spirit, Jesus must have asked himself questions such as these.

Of course the synagogue has, in the course of history, tried to adorn and brighten the return to the beginning of the Pentateuch cycle. It has been made to follow after Yom Kippur, as if to signify that only after purification by fasting can the faithful make a fresh start. It has been glorified by the addition of a special ceremony, the Simhat Torah, during which a procession of children winds its way clamorously through the synagogue, brandishing the scroll of the Law, ever old and ever new. Perhaps Jesus himself took part in some such demonstration.

But whatever gaiety attended upon the return to the beginnings, Jesus may have continued to think longingly of the future. He may even have imagined a "176th parashah," never yet read or interpreted, which would give Jewish worship an outlet into the future. Perhaps, as he followed the services held in the synagogue of Nazareth, Jesus dreamed of writing, of living, this "176th parashah" himself.

In any case, as we have just seen, the Jew of Jesus' time made his first contact with the history of Israel

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through the didactic readings of the Pentateuch. The synagogue's second treatment of this history is less bookish, more familiar and specifically Jewish in character. It consists of reviving and reliving history by means of a series of religious holidays, each one of them reminiscent of an event of the past. Rosh Hashana commemorates the Creation; Passover the exodus from Egypt; Pentecost (Shavuot) the gift of the Law; Tabernacles (Succot) includes two symbolic rites: first that of the *succah* (the "booth" or grass tent in which the Children of Israel sojourned in the desert), where there is a blessing of the season's wine, and second, that of the *lulav*, a bundle of palm, myrtle and willow branches, held together with a citron, and shaken in the direction of the four points of the compass as a reminder of God's goodness to Israel. Among the minor feats are Hanukkah, which celebrates the cleansing of the temple after the victory of Judas Maccabeus, and Purim (Lots), in honor of Esther's triumph over the cruel Haman, one of the first men in history who tried to exterminate the Jews.

And so every religious holiday is an evocation of the past, an evocation of a down-to-earth kind, which it is hard to imagine outside of Judaism, not so much a retelling of the story as a reliving of it. The commemorations of modern times glorify, as wholeheartedly as they can, a dead hero or a great deed of the past. But the gap of time leaves the participants with a feeling of detachment. No matter how elaborate are the parades, how eloquent the speeches, the hero is only a dead man and the event of a hundred years ago cannot be brought to life. This fits in with the Greek and Roman conception

of time, in which past, present and future occupy fenced-off areas and the path between them is one-way and can never be retraced.

For the Jew of Biblical days, to celebrate a past event meant to relive it; to honor a dead hero meant to resurrect him. A Jewish commemoration is essentially a re-enactment. The Jew who takes part in it, although he knows that the past is dead and buried, feels himself close to and almost in the skin of his great predecessor. He is Adam, driven from the Garden of Eden, Noah building the Ark, Moses on Mount Sinai, Abraham receiving God's order to leave everything and go accomplish his mission.

To compare a deep religious experience with a contemporary criminological procedure, we may say that a Jewish commemorative ceremony is like the police's attempt to obtain a murderer's confession by making him reenact his crime. In the course of the religious rite the participants are plunged into the past. This is obvious, in a naïve but convincing manner, in the role they play in the celebration.

Let us take, for instance, Purim. The greater part of the service, which glorifies the victory of the Jew, Mordecai, over the persecutor, Haman, consists of a reading of the Megillah, or scroll, containing the Book of Esther. During this reading the listeners are not in the least passive; they are not like schoolboys, who know the end of an oft-told tale and pay no attention to it. To them every episode of the drama is very much alive. They are afraid that things may go badly, that Mordecai may be overcome or Esther repudiated. With every fiber of their

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being they strive to contribute to the defeat of Haman, who they know is the forerunner of other persecutors. As we have seen earlier, at every mention of his name the children stamp their feet, as if he were present among them and they were trying to scare him away. May we not imagine that in the first days of Christianity, before Synagogue and Church were separated, Jewish children, loyal to Jesus, stamped their feet in the same way at the name of Judas?

There is another and still more significant example. The Hebrew word *Pesach* (Passover) means a passage from the natural to the supernatural order. Man is a creature of this passing-over; his role is that of a link between the Creator and His creation. In the life of Jesus the Passover has a recurring importance. It was on the occasion of the Passover that Jesus went, at the age of twelve, to Jerusalem and, according to Saint Luke, met the doctors. Once his bar-mitzvah was accomplished, we may imagine that he made the same journey every year. And after the hidden years were over and he had been baptized by Saint John, the Gospels record four Passover celebrations. Is it not highly significant that the Last Supper, the prelude to the Passion, was a repetition of the Seder, the ritual meal which Jewish families ate together on the eve of the Passover?

For Jesus, as for the other Jews of his time, the Passover was the crowning point of the religious year, the time when history was the most vividly alive in their conscience. At this moment the *berith*, the covenant, was closest to them; as they sat at the supper table they were more than ever aware that it had never been abol-

ished. And what is the exact nature of the Passover celebration? It is celebrated in two different ways: publicly, in the synagogue, and privately, in the home.

The Passover celebration in the synagogue is one of the most striking pieces of Jewish liturgy, in its richness and diversity. There are prayers and benedictions which, as in any religious service, mark the sacred aspect of the rite; these are like the spires of a cathedral, stretching up to heaven. But in the early centuries of a faith, when sanctuaries are built and liturgies come into being, this heavenward aspiration does not prevent, indeed it positively favors the thrust of roots into the ground. A Gothic cathedral, it has been said, is a Bible in stone, in whose stained glass and sculpture even an illiterate man can find everything he needs to know, not only to worship God but also to live in the world. For alongside the images of God and His saints there are familiar, even sensual scenes. When the cathedrals were built, religion was much less conventional than it is now.

Jewish liturgy, particularly that of the Passover, is in this domain a forerunner of the Gothic cathedral. The most solemn prayers are harmoniously mingled with expressions of love and adoration, which are not in the least disincarnate and ethereal but, on the contrary, earthy, fleshly, and closely tied to human nature and history. The office is a melody, with the same themes recurring, not in a logical sequence but according to an inwardly meaningful plan. First, the theme of the exodus from Egypt, developed in a series of short litanies. These have doubtless been added to over the centuries, but

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since they are inspired by the midrash, which was already in formation at Jesus' time, we may say that he would have understood their feeling.

On Passover the affliction of the faithful was decreed for a span of four hundred years, on the days of the Passover . . .

On Passover He slew Ham's firstborn, but upon His own first-begotten he had compassion, on the days of the Passover.

The Passover was ordained for judgement of evildoers, and that thereon saviors should go up to Zion, as on the days of the Passover.

On Passover He wove destruction about the foe, and redeemed His cherished sons from bondage, on the days of the Passover . . .

Here we have a brief summary of the commemorated events, which return again and again in prayers and benedictions. Later on in the service there is a more detailed treatment, taken from Nehemiah:

[Thou] didst see the affliction of our fathers in Egypt, and hearest their cry by the Red Sea;

And shewedst signs and wonders upon Pharaoh, and on all his servants, and on all the people of his land: for thou knewest that they deal proudly against them. So didst thou get thee a name as it is this day.

And thou didst divide the sea before them, so that they went through the midst of the sea on the dry land;

*and their persecutors thou threwest into the deeps, as a stone into the mighty water.*

And the parashah for Passover is, of course, taken from the chapters of Exodus relating the escape from Egypt and the passage of the Red Sea. This historical theme is intertwined with the great liturgical prayers—the *Shema*, *Barekhu*, *Shemoneh-Esreh*, *Alenu*—forming a part, but not all, of their human accompaniment. Because for the people of Israel, crowding the synagogues, as for the Christians crowding their cathedrals, every form of worship had its familiar side. In this Jewish solemnity, which has history for a connecting thread, spiritual exaltation and physical incarnation are found side by side. In a portion of the Passover office inspired by The Song of Solomon, God is the lover to whom Israel, the beloved, addresses a song of love.

*I am black but comely . . .*

*My beloved is mine and I am his . . .*

*My beloved is like the hart and the young roe; my God of mercy goeth before me . . .*

*My flesh and my heart pine for him . . .*

*My beloved is white and ruddy, an ensign among his hosts . . .*

*My beloved is altogether lovely; his judgements are true, sweet and pleasant . . .*

This intimacy with God, expressing itself in the language of human love, extends to the whole of the body.

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The Jew, feeling himself in the physical presence of God, falls into the posture of the loved one before the lover.

We now offer for Thy devotion every individual limb in our body, with the spirit and breath which Thou hast blown in our nostrils, with the tongue in our mouth. With all these we thank, laud, praise, glorify, revere, hallow and assign sovereignty to Thy Name, O our King. For every mouth shall give thanks unto Thee, and every tongue shall swear loyalty unto Thee; every knee shall bow to Thee and every body shall prostrate itself before Thee.

And so, as he celebrates the Passover, the Jew is never disembodied or set apart from the world around him. The poetry of nature is added to that of love, and the universe vibrates in tune with the psalm:

When Israel went out of Egypt . . .  
The sea saw it and fled; Jordan was driven back.  
The mountains skipped like rams, and the little hills  
like lambs.

Unlikely, these words, if we take them literally. But in such figures of speech we have the real world, the land with which Jesus and the Jews of his time were so familiar that they could not help both humanizing and deifying its everyday aspects. Even its secretions spoke of God. For instance, the dew of the fields, symbolic of God's covenant with man, inspires the following:

Dew, precious dew, unto Thy land forlorn!  
Pour out our blessing in Thy exultation,  
To strengthen us with ample wine and corn  
And give Thy Chosen City safe foundation . . .

For Thou art the Lord our God who causest the wind to blow and the dew to descend:

For a blessing and not for a curse,  
For life and not for death,  
For plenty and not for famine.

The synagogue's Passover liturgy is, then, firmly rooted in the real world, in bodily and earthy aspirations as well as in the recreation of the past.

But there is another and more significant aspect of the Passover celebration. The evening meal, the Seder, which Jesus must have attended as a boy and young man before he made it the basis of his Last Supper, has a capital part to play. Here, according to Heinrich Heine, is the spirit in which it should be prepared:

As soon as night falls, the mistress of the house lights the lamps, spreads the tablecloth, puts three pieces of the flat unleavened bread in its midst, covers them with a napkin, and on the pile places six little dishes containing symbolical food: an egg, lettuce, horse-radish, the bone of a lamb, and a brown mixture of raisins, cinnamon, and nuts. At this table, the head of the house then sits down with all relations and friends, and reads to them from a very curious book called the Haggadah, the con-

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tents of which are a strange mixture of ancestral legends, miraculous tales of Egypt, odd narratives, disputations, prayers, and festive songs. A huge supper is brought in halfway through this celebration; and even during the reading, at certain times, one tastes of the symbolic dishes, eats pieces of unleavened bread, and drinks four cups of red wine. This nocturnal festival is melancholically gay in character, gravely playful, and mysterious as a fairy tale. And the traditional singsong in which the *Haggadah* is read by the head of the house, and now and then repeated by the listeners in chorus, sounds at the same time so awesomely intense, maternally gentle, and suddenly awakening, that even those Jews who have long forsaken the faith of their fathers and pursued foreign joys and honors are moved to the depths of their hearts when the old, familiar sounds of the Passover happen to strike their ears.

Such is a poet's view of the outward trappings of the Seder. Romantic as his picture may seem, it is a faithful reproduction. The Seder's purpose is to call vividly to mind the flight from Egypt, the end of Israel's bondage. In this context every detail is significant. The unleavened bread, which becomes the sacred wafer or host of the Christian rite, is reminiscent of the fugitives' fare:

*Lo! This is the bread of affliction which our fathers ate in the land of Egypt. Let all who are hungry come and eat. Let all who are in want come and celebrate the Passover with us. This year we celebrate it here, but next year we hope to celebrate it in the land of Israel.*

This year we are bondsmen, but next year we hope to be free.

The bitter herbs, the horse-radish, the parsley dipped in vinegar or salt water, represent the bitterness of exile. The youngest member of the family asks:

Why is this night of Pesach so different from all other nights of the year? On all other nights, we eat either leavened bread or unleavened bread; why on this night, do we eat only matzoh, which is unleavened bread? On all other nights we eat vegetables and herbs of all kinds; why on this night, do we eat bitter herbs especially? On all other nights, we never think of dipping herbs in water or in anything else; why on this night do we dip the parsley in salt water and the bitter herbs in Haroset? On all other nights, everyone sits up straight at the table; why on this night do we all recline at the table?

To these naïve questions, which Jesus must have asked as a child and answered as a young man, the head of the household replies:

We were Pharaoh's bondsmen in Egypt, and the Lord our God delivered us with a mighty hand . . .

The Lord our God delivered us. But this is not simply an event of the past. For the liturgy defines the contemporary meaning of the liberation:

*It is the duty of each individual Jew in every generation to regard himself as though he personally had*

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come out of Egypt. Not our ancestors alone has the Holy One (praised be His name) redeemed. "And He brought us out from thence, that He might bring us in, to give us the land which He sware unto our fathers."

Here, in its essential vigor, is the resurrection of history which characterizes the Jewish religion. On this particular evening the regular meal takes on an unusual significance and evokes the destiny of Israel. The relationship between father and children is impregnated with tradition, and the wind of the spirit blows through the odor of food and the clamor of conversation. This table is like any other table, and yet it is one of a kind, symbolic of the ingenuous and genuine fashion in which God has written himself into Israel's history. Here we have the tragicomic character of the race, its concrete religiosity and the subtlety of its elucubrations.

Among the more picturesque legends of the Haggadah is that of the kid, *Had Gadia*, symbolic of Israel, persecuted by infidels but eventually able, thanks to God's grace, to escape from them.

In the typically Hebraic form of the litany, the Haggadah contains a canticle of praise, built up from verse to verse. This is the thanksgiving whose refrain is *Dayyenu* (That would have sufficed us), signifying that God's kindness surpasses our expectation:

How many degrees of magnificence hath the Almighty conferred upon us! . . .

If He had divided the sea for us and had not made us pass through it on dry land, *Dayyenu*.

*If He had made us pass through its midst on dry land and had not sunk our oppressors into the sea, Dayyenu.*

*If He had sunk our oppressors into the sea and had not supplied our wants in the wilderness, Dayyenu.*

*If He had supplied our wants in the wilderness and had not fed us with manna, Dayyenu.*

*If He had fed us with manna and had not given us the Sabbath, Dayyenu.*

*If He had given us the Sabbath and had not brought us to Mount Sinai, Dayyenu.*

*If He had brought us to Mount Sinai and had not given us His law, Dayyenu.*

*If He had given us His law and had not led us into the land of Israel, Dayyenu.*

*If He had led us into the land of Israel and had not built the Temple, Dayyenu.*

The family is gathered together, then, for the Passover meal, just as Jesus' disciples were gathered on the eve of the Passion. The prayers said on this occasion are born of casual, intimate conversation, and the food is an offering. Each one of those present tells his own story, and all together they retell the story of Israel. It is difficult to say which part of the meal is sacred and which is profane. There is no mystery except that of human destiny; no liturgical element in the order of courses or of conversation. At this paschal meal God is the guest of the Jewish family, an unobtrusive guest who in this simple and intimate fashion imprints Himself upon the history of man,

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a living God who takes part in the most commonplace and necessary of natural processes.

As always, in Israel, the present is filled with anticipation of the future. The door is left open, and there is an empty seat at the table, and a plate which will not need to be washed when the meal is over. This is the place prepared for Elijah, the prophet of the Messiah, and there is disappointment when he fails to occupy it, in spite of the fact that no one really thought that he would come. The coming of the Messiah is the most typical of Jewish myths, whose tangible reality is less important than its inner meaning. Everyone knows that Elijah will not show up before the end of the meal, but his appearance at H-hour or on D-day does not matter. What matters is that everything should proceed as if one day, perhaps this day or the next, he *will* come. The important thing in the reliving of Israel's history is not the succession of facts, but their significance. Let us leave to pagans and positivists the idolatrous conception of the miracle as a contradiction of natural law to which the Eternal must have recourse in order to demonstrate His power. History is a never-ending miracle; we know that it will remain unfinished and yet we continue to hope that it will come to fruition. Life is a miracle, too, in spite of the commonplace means by which it is perpetuated. The Messiah is present at every moment, in every gesture by which life is made into history. Life is fleeting and history is incomplete, but the Messiah's place is always ready beside us, even if he never comes to occupy it.

Did Jesus save a place for Elijah at the Last Supper?

Or, after his disciples had gathered together, did he shut the door?

When Jesus was preparing for his bar-mitzvah he also learned to pray.

Jewish prayer is not a petition addressed to God; it is man's support of the action of his Creator. Every prayer based on purely personal motives is habitually repressed. "Some men never receive an answer to their prayers," says the Sepher Hasidim, "because they are insensitive to the needs and misfortunes of others."

Because of man's proneness to materialism and idolatry, Jewish prayer, like any other, may have a utilitarian and self-seeking aim. Even in the Psalms there are passages where the righteous are promised a reward. But this is not what prayer should be. Prayer concerns not the creature but the Creator. It reinforces God's power without offering any guarantee that it will be used to satisfy the desires of man.

When Israel is happy it attributes its happiness to God and extols His glory. In adversity, as Elias Munk says, "Israel does not think of the affront to its own honor but of the profanation of the divine name . . . Israel feels its shame as if it were the shame of God, and rejoices in His triumph as if it were its own. Like David, we say: 'Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory.' "

This is a forerunner of Jesus' ejaculation: "Thy will be done"; at the same time it underlines the effacement of man before God, which paradoxically causes him to share God's power.

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In Jesus' time, and particularly at remote Nazareth, Jewish prayer was pure and severe. Among the prayers in use in the synagogue today it is possible to identify those which were in use two thousands years ago. A Christian attending a Jewish service can be sure that some of the prayers he hears were said by Jesus in the course of those hidden years in which he studied the way to accomplish Israel's mission and his own.

As to the exact composition of the service in the synagogue during the period of the second Temple, when Jesus was alive, opinions may differ. There is no precise document to guide us. A prayer current today, the *Lechah dodi* which greets the Sabbath in these amorous terms:

*Beloved, come, the bride to meet,  
The Princess Sabbath let us greet . . .*

dates no farther back than the sixteenth century. The age of others, such as the *Alenu* and the *Kaddish*, is debatable, but there are grounds for believing that they existed at Jesus' time. The *Alenu* is a prayer concerning Israel's universal mission, and at every divine service the faithful recite it:

*It is incumbent upon us to give praise to the Lord of the Universe, to glorify Him who formed creation, for He hath not made us to be like the nations of the lands nor the families of the earth. He hath not set our portion with theirs nor our lot with their multitude . . . Therefore do we wait for thee, O Lord our God, soon to behold*

thy mighty glory, when thou wilt remove the abominations from the earth, and idols shall be exterminated . . .

According to rabbinical tradition, which is intuitive rather than factual, Joshua pronounced this prayer when he led the Children of Israel into the Promised Land. Edmond Fleg dates it back to the period of the Second Temple, when Jesus was alive, but Armand Lipman attributes it to Abba Arika, a Babylonian rabbi of the third century.

As to the *Kaddish*, we have no proof of its date, but there is a strong likelihood that it goes back to the time of Jesus. As circumstantial evidence, we may mention the fact that it seems to have inspired the Lord's Prayer. This is a matter which we shall take up in greater detail later on.

Three other prayers—the *Shema*, the *Shemoneh-Esreh* and the *Barekhu*—date back, without any doubt, to Jesus' time. We can be quite sure that, in the synagogue of Nazareth, Jesus recited them. The service began with the Ten Commandments, which were, however, eliminated before the end of the first century. Then came the *Shema*, the cornerstone of Jewish monotheism which, apart from its place in the synagogue, every Jew must say morning and evening. The *Shema*, as we know, is composed of three passages from the Torah or Pentateuch and of three benedictions, two before and one after. The first passage is from the words spoken by Moses, in the book of Deuteronomy (6:4), after he had come down from Sinai with the Ten Commandments:

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Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God, the Lord is one:  
And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy  
heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.

And these words, which I command thee this day, shall  
be upon thine heart:

And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy chil-  
dren, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine  
house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou  
liest down, and when thou risest up.

And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand,  
and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes.

And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy  
house, and on thy gates.

To the young Jesus this beginning of the Shema was an historical pronouncement from the crucial point of his people's story; to say it was almost like singing a national anthem. This was no set of abstract precepts; it was the voice of Moses, perpetuated in the liturgy.

The second section of the prayer (Deuteronomy 11: 13-21) is in Moses' words also. God has told Moses that if the Children of Israel obey the Law, "I will send grass in thy fields for thy cattle, and thou shalt eat and be satisfied." If, on the other hand, they "turn aside, and serve other gods, and worship them," if they commit Israel's besetting sin of idolatry, "then the anger of the Lord be kindled against you, and he shut up the heavens, so that there shall be no rain, and the ground shall not yield its fruit; and ye perish quickly from off the good land which the Lord giveth you."

There is no question here of individual reward or punishment. Both the promise and the threat are addressed to the whole people, and at this historical moment we cannot dismiss them as products of superstition. It was an overwhelming fact that Israel's fate depended on its loyalty to the Covenant. Every individual's destiny was linked with that of the nation, and the only thing he could do to better his own lot was to advance the mission of Israel. This is what the end of the second part of the *Shema* tells him:

*Therefore shall ye lay up these words in your heart and in your soul . . .*

*That your days may be multiplied, and the days of your children, in the land which the Lord sware unto your fathers to give them, as the days of the heaven above the earth.*

After this confirmation of the bond between every son of Israel and the whole people, the third part of the *Shema* (*Numbers, 15:37*) conveys some very precise instructions:

*And the Lord spoke unto Moses saying,*

*Speak unto the children of Israel, and bid them to make them fringes in the borders of their garments, and put upon the fringe of each border a thread of blue.*

*And it shall be unto you for a fringe, that ye may look upon it, and remember all the commandments of the Lord, and do them; and that ye follow not after*

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your own heart and your own eyes, after which ye use to go astray.

That ye may remember, and do all my commandments, and be holy unto your God.

I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: I am the Lord your God.

As he pronounces the first verse of the Shema the officiant, who is turned toward the tabernacle, covers his eyes, to show that the sight of God is more than man can bear. The congregation remains seated, because God's commands are not ecstatic or transcendent; they are made to the measure of man, to be written into his doorpost and the hem of his garment.

The benedictions before and after the Shema take us into the realm of the berakhot, the expression of man's support of the work of the Creator. In the first of the berakhot the officiant blesses God for giving light:

Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who formest light and createst darkness, who maketh peace and createst all things; who in mercy givest light to the world and to them that dwell therein; who in thy goodness renewest the work of creation every day continually, and who hast arranged the lights in heaven, rejoicing the world which thou has created: Blessed art thou, O Lord, Creator of the luminaries.

In the second he thanks God for the gift of the Torah:

With abounding love hast thou loved us, O Lord our God, with great and exceeding pity hast thou pitied us,

our Father, our King. O our Father, merciful Father, ever compassionate, have mercy upon us; O put it into our hearts to understand and to discern, to mark, learn and teach, to heed, to do and to fulfill in love all the words of instruction in thy Law . . . It is us whom thou hast chosen out of all people and tongues; in love hast thou brought us near to thy great Name, our King, that we may praise thee and proclaim thy unity: Blessed art thou, who hast chosen thy people Israel in love.

These two blessings go before the Shema; the one which comes after it is in thanksgiving for the Covenant between God and Israel:

True, steadfast, firm, enduring, right, and faithful; beloved and precious, desirable and pleasant, revered and mighty, well-ordered and acceptable, good and beautiful is this word which thou hast spoken to us from of old and for evermore. Thou hast been the support of our fathers, their Shield and Salvation, their Deliverer and Redeemer from of old. Thou art the first and thou art the last, and beside thee we have no King, Redeemer, or Saviour. Blessed art thou, O Lord, who redeemest Israel.

There are other benedictions besides those before and after the Shema, quite separate from it. The Shemoneh-Esreh, or Amidah, and the Barekhu mark the culminating point of man's impulse toward God. The Amidah is a silent prayer, now known also as the Shemoneh-Esreh (the Eighteen Blessings). In Jesus' time it was composed of only the first and last three of this number.

The other twelve have been added throughout the years and do not have the same purity of intention as the original six, which constitute a participation in God's work. The first exalts the "God of our fathers, God of Abraham, God of Isaac and God of Jacob, the Creator of all, King, Helper, Savior and Shield." The second pays homage to God, as "sustaining the living and resurrecting the dead."

The third is in worship of God's holiness: "Blessed be Thou, O Lord, the Holy God."

The three final benedictions are also contributions to God's work, which do not ask anything from him. The sixteenth blesses God for the privilege of worshiping him "in fear." The seventeenth blesses God for accepting man's thanksgiving. The last, perhaps the most typical and most important, is concerned with peace: "Bestow peace . . . upon all Israel, thy people . . . Bless us by the light of thy countenance . . . Blessed be thou, O Lord, who blessest thy people Israel with peace."

A Talmudic scholar, Rabbi Joshua ben Levy, describes this last benediction's relation to the world as that of leaven to dough, as the "motive force of human progress." The ancient Greeks seemed to look on war as the great leaven. But to the Jews, life is a perpetual struggle for peace. The very word *sholom* signifies both peace and well-being.

It is natural enough that the twelve intermediary benedictions, which we may presume to be later interpolations, should not have the same disinterested character. They presume to ask God's help for man—that he reveal true wisdom, that he ransom and forgive, that he exercise

mental and physical healing, that he increase the harvest, that he gather in the exiles, that he listen to prayers. At the time of the second Temple, the time of Jesus, in the village of Nazareth, where the Jewish faith was pure and simple, the worship of God did not ask for any blessing in return, except for the satisfaction which a man might hope to feel from aiding and abetting God's work.

The *Amidah*, as we have indicated above, is said silently and in a standing position, to indicate that it is aimed unerringly at God and cannot fall back to the ground.

The *Barekhu*, the last prayer which we can be sure that Jesus knew, is the most solemn and all-embracing, as well as the shortest, of all benedictions, consisting of two sentences, one spoken by the officiant:

“Praise ye the Lord, to whom all praise is due.”

To which the congregation responds:

“Praised be the Lord, to whom all praise is due for ever and ever.”

In pronouncing these words Jesus, like any other Jew, bowed in the direction of the tabernacle, thereby backing up the prayer with the motion of his body. Every word, every gesture underlined man's total submission to God.

“Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake.”

Such were the purity and disinterestedness of Jewish prayer at the time when Jesus was initiated into the religion of Israel. It was an uplifting of the spirit toward God, without distraction or calculation, a moment of

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harmony between man's condition on earth and what he glimpses of heaven. It might be almost too rarefied, were it not that the most glorious moments of Israel's history have a human context which makes them concrete and accessible. There is no screen, no intermediary between God and man. A *midrash* dating from Jesus' time, which recounts Moses' ascent of Mount Sinai, illustrates the intimacy between them.

When Moses started to climb the mountain where he was to receive the Law, some angels stopped him. "What are you doing here, miserable creature?" they asked. "Who gave you permission to enter the domain of purity?" To which Moses answered, quite simply: "I am a son of Abraham, and I have come on behalf of Israel to receive God's law." But the angels were not satisfied, and they breathed their burning breath upon him. "Master of the world," Moses implored. "I am afraid that they will burn me." And God answered reassuringly: "Seize the throne of my glory and you will find words to defend yourself." Having obtained God's support the prophet spoke to the angels in simple, human, common-sense terms, which quite disconcerted them. "Do you want to prevent me from receiving the Law?" he asked. "What business is it of yours? It's a Law made for human beings. And are you human? It is written in the Torah: 'Honor thy father and thy mother.' Have you father and mother? And it is further written: 'Thou shalt not covet.' Have you ever coveted? The Torah prescribes resting on the Sabbath day. Have you ever worked on that day or any other? The Torah forbids adultery. And

are there any women among you? I say that the Law is not your affair."

Nonplussed by his human reasoning, the angels turned to God. But he, in his turn, told his encumbering servants some hard truths. "Ever since you came into being," he said, "you've prevented me from doing what I wanted . . . When I wanted to create the first man, you asked: 'What is he doing, that fellow?' and gave me no peace until I had destroyed several of you . . . Now you're beginning all over; you want to prevent me from giving Israel the Torah. Fools! Unless Israel receives the Torah there will be no place in the universe for you, or even for me!"

When Jesus heard this story, what a feeling of intimacy with God it must have given him! The twelve years he spent at Nazareth fell in an unusually pure and harmonious period of Jewish religious history, when everything combined to give the feeling of that peace which is epitomized in the word *sholom*. The landscape, the social structure, the language, the liturgy all played their part. Jesus' early years came at a time when the Jewish religion still had the ingenuousness of its origins, as well as the lucid assurance of maturity. No doubt or anxiety, on the one hand; no weakness or compromise or superstition on the other, but an atmosphere of healthy balance; a strong faith and a tranquil mystery.

God's covenant with His people, this unambiguous contract so deeply rooted in history, to which each successive generation can write a codicil, gives every man a place to fill. Another *midrash* text, a commentary on the

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Book of Job, sets forth some wisdom capable of curing any human anxiety:

Do not seek that which is beyond you. Do not seek to explore that which is far away. That which is more marvelous than yourself you can never hope to know. Do not try to discover that which is hidden. Work to understand the heritage which God has given you. Nothing obscure or unrevealed need occupy your mind.

This commentary further develops the idea: "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God." (Deuteronomy 29:29.) The religion in which Jesus was instructed when he prepared for his bar-mitzvah was a point of balance between mystery and reality. It is a wonderful thing to be on familiar terms with the ineffable, to be intimate with God.

P A R T   T W O

*Jerusalem*

# 5.

## The Arrival at Jerusalem

WHEN Jesus went, at twelve years of age, with Mary and Joseph to Jerusalem, it was under circumstances that any of us, particularly Frenchmen, can imagine. For he was like a child of 1940, traveling from an undisturbed village of the "free zone" to Nazi-occupied Paris. As he approached the city, conflicting feelings must have occupied his mind. On the one hand joy at the possibility of becoming acquainted with the political and spiritual center of his country, on the other, sorrow that it should be in foreign hands.

Jerusalem was originally built at the border between two tribes, those of Benjamin and Judah, on a piece of stony ground, surrounded by hills. In the course of its growth, like any other city, it absorbed a large number of villages around it. The Jerusalem of Jesus' time, under Roman occupation, consisted of three different sections, formerly independent one of the other. First the ancient

town of Jebus, which King David won from the Jebusites. This was situated on a hill south of the future location of the Temple, but had originally no sanctuary of any kind. Second, the new city which David, the conqueror, built on Mount Zion, to the north. This was to be the seat of the Royal Palace and the Temple, the latter on the slopes of a foothill of Mount Zion, known as Moriah. Between the two hills, Jebus and Zion, was the valley of Millo which David, and Solomon after him, filled in so as to join the two settlements together. Third, a gradually developed new section along the ravine formed by the Brook Kidron.

Jerusalem lived and grew, like many another city, first under the impulsion of an energetic king, then as if by the spontaneous proliferation of its individual houses, until its stones and mud-daubed walls and pavements spread over all the space formerly occupied only by the springs of Gihon and Siloam. By Jesus' time the city had attained its maximum size; it had a circumference of about three miles. This was the length of the wall which the Roman emperor, Titus, threw up around it.

Within this enclosure, numbering a quarter of a million inhabitants, there were all sorts of historical sites. Most conspicuous, alas, the military installations which allowed the Roman conquerors to maintain order. On Mount Zion the fortress of Antiochus and the Tower of Antonia, at the northeast corner of the Temple, with a view over its every entrance and exit. But the Romans were concerned not only with security, but with convenience. Pilate's palace was almost next door to the north-

ern façade of the Temple; Agrippa's palace rose on the east slope of Mount Zion, overhung by Golgotha; the palace of Herod, the collaborationist king, was not far from the Tower of Antonia. Alongside the public monuments there were a theatre, a hippodrome, two profane swimming pools and a sacred one, the Sheep Pool, next to the Temple, which served for the washing of sacrificial victims. Then there were markets: the fish market to the east, the livestock and wood markets to the south, near the Temple, to which they supplied both burnt offerings and the fuel to burn them.

All these sites and buildings had in the course of centuries been destroyed and rebuilt and generally subjected to the vicissitudes of history. Twice conquered, by Joshua and David, before it definitely passed into Jewish hands and fell under the alternate rule of Judah and Israel, the city had already known glory and humiliation on so many occasions that to enumerate them would mean to recapitulate most of the Old Testament. The pillage of the Temple and the Royal Palace; the destruction of four hundred cubits of the walls by Joash, king of Israel, who subsequently returned to Samaria; the tribute of ten talents of gold and a hundred talents of silver claimed by Necho, king of Egypt, on his way back from an expedition to the Euphrates; the ravages of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Chaldea, who after his first attack led three thousand and twenty-three Jews into captivity in Babylon and then, during a fourth expedition, razed the Temple and indeed the whole city and made captives of the whole people and their king. . . . Even before Nebuchadnezzar the city had changed hands nine times.

Nor was this the end of its vicissitudes. After the Babylonian captivity, around 500 b.c., Jerusalem was rebuilt and repeopled. But more destruction lay ahead. It was conquered by Alexander the Great and by several Egyptian kings. Ptolemy, son of Lagus, captured the city by wile and deported a hundred thousand of its inhabitants; Ptolemy Evergetes offered up sacrifices within its walls; Ptolemy Philopater was not allowed to enter the Temple and as a result exercised reprisals against the Jews in Egypt. The Seleucid dynasty of Syria was likewise involved in Jerusalem's history. Antiochus the Great exhibited his army and his elephants; he granted privileges to the Jews and gave money for sacrifices in the Temple. His son, Seleucus Philopater, was less generous, and indeed made inroads on the Temple's treasury. Seleucus Philopater's brother and successor, Antiochus Epiphanes, was received in Jerusalem with a torchlight procession and imagined himself to be popular among the Jews. Thirty years later, a false rumor of his death caused another and more genuine celebration, which roused him to such anger that he besieged the city, plundered it, took the gold and precious vessels out of the Temple and killed eighty thousand people. Two later kings of the same family, Antiochus Eupater and Antiochus Sidetes, destroyed Jerusalem's walls, but let Jewish kings rule over the defenseless city.

In the course of another one of the periods of turbulence, so common in the Middle East at this time, the high priest Hyrcanus called for help upon the Romans. Pompey captured Jerusalem and entered the sanctuary of the Temple, but as an ancient chronicler tells us, he

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"was so restrained that he touched none of the great treasures in this holy place. He admired the faithfulness of the priests, who had gone on with their worship amid the tumult and violence of the siege. On the day after he had taken over the Temple he commanded them to purify it and offer up sacrifices."

This was the beginning of Roman rule, which like any other occupation was alternately hostile and kindly. Augustus professed great respect for the Temple. He made gifts to it and ordered the daily sacrifice of an ox and two lambs on behalf of the Roman people. Pontius Pilate, on the other hand, was so scornful of Jewish customs that he started to make his entrance into the city under banners bearing the portrait of the deified Emperor, in defiance of the conquered people's aversion to "graven images." The Jews threw themselves onto the ground and declared that they were ready to die rather than suffer such a profanation. As a result, Pilate abandoned his plan. This episode, which took place fifteen years after Jesus' first visit to Jerusalem, shows how sensitive were the Jews to the holiness of their capital and its sanctuary and how prone were the Romans to make a display of their power.

As Jesus and his family approached the Holy City, the memory of its sieges and destruction, the profanations of the Temple and the alternate conflict and compromise between God and Caesar must have added a note of pathos to their awe.

Although Nazareth lies north of Jerusalem, Jesus and his family in all likelihood entered it from the south, in

order not to cross the whole city to reach the Temple, a procedure frowned upon by the Roman police. After going through the Vale of Jehosaphat and crossing the Brook Kidron, they probably went in by the Gate of Siloam. This route held advantages for Romans and Jews alike. For the Romans because the crowd of pilgrims could be kept under watch from the Tower of Antonia; for the Jews because it led them by the Sheep Pool where they could, if they wished, prepare their sacrifices. Already from the Mount of Olives Jesus had seen the splendor of the Temple. At this time, probably in order to quiet his Jewish conscience, Herod was in the process of rebuilding and embellishing it. The reconstruction, begun in 19 B.C. was not yet finished when Jesus entered upon his ministry in A.D. 28.

Other things besides the Temple must have greeted his sight. All around the city of stone, a city of tents had been thrown up to house the faithful who had come to celebrate the Passover. The inaccurate Flavius Josephus would have us believe that the usual population of 250,000 went up, at this season, to two and a half or three million. Let us, as Jules Isaac in his book *Jesus et Israel* suggests, bring this extravagant figure down to a few hundred thousand. Even so, we can imagine that the young Jesus, fresh from the sparsely inhabited village of Nazareth, found himself in a crowd which must have seemed overwhelming. And that his eyes were dazzled by the city's architecture, particularly the gleaming gold and marble of the Temple.

And yet once he was over his initial surprise he may have felt a certain disappointment. Even on the Mount

of Olives, the "hill of anointing," he could see the tables of the money changers and of the sellers of doves to be used as sacrifices, the inevitable hangers-on who in the vicinity of any sanctuary importune the faithful with their wares. Actually they were forbidden to enter the Temple. The Talmud, which hands down the oral tradition of these times, tells us that the Temple was closed to "those who had money knotted into their handkerchiefs." Likewise, in the Berakot or tractate, we are told that no one could come with "canes or sacks or dirty feet." The Pharisees had strict laws against the changing of money or the display of sacrificial animals even in the courtyard of the Temple, and for this reason the merchants had installed themselves on the hill. Here, when he was only twelve years old, Jesus may have already felt the urge to chase them away. When Mary and Joseph saw how shocked he was by such crass commercialism perhaps they quoted to him the words of the Talmud which says: "The Temple is not to be made into a passageway." The influence of this precept is clearly to be seen in Saint Mark's account of Jesus and the money changers, where it is said that he "would not suffer that any man should carry any vessel through the Temple." We may wonder, however, if this episode did not actually take place on the Mount of Olives rather than in the Temple, since within its precincts buying and selling were already forbidden.

Another thing that must have struck Jesus unfavorably was the presence of the Romans. Their soldiers did not merely keep watch over the city from the Tower of Antonia. A cordon of armed troops surrounded the walls

and inspected everyone who went in. Moreover, the Roman governor, who lived during most of the year at Caesarea, came to Jerusalem for the three main Jewish religious festivals, particularly the Passover. Needless to say, this was not for any spiritual reason. The large numbers of Jews thronging the city were in a devotional mood which might easily take the form of a demonstration against the conqueror, and such a possibility demanded the presence of the Emperor's highest representative and the embodiment of Roman law. Troops were stationed in the galleries near the Temple, not only to maintain order among the faithful but also as a reminder to the clergy of the fact that their tenure—even including that of the high priest—was subject to Roman approval.

The stolid Roman soldiers viewed with silent scorn the fervor of the more excitable Jews. According to the Roman historian, Tacitus, whose understanding seems to have been on about the level of that of a centurion on guard in the streets of Jerusalem, Jewish customs were "base and abominable." As long as the Assyrians, Medes and Persians were masters of the region, Tacitus tells us, the Jews were considered "the meanest of their subjects." They were revolutionaries who refused to acknowledge the gods of Olympus or to feel any real allegiance to Rome. Strange to say, they believed that "the souls of those who are killed in battle or by the executioner are immortal." And this was only one of the alien features of the religion to which they were so devoted. "Moses introduced new religious practices, quite opposed to those of all other religions. The Jews regard as profane all that we hold sacred; on the other hand they permit all that

we abhor . . . The Jews conceive of one god only, and that with the mind alone. They regard as impious those who make from perishable materials representations of gods in man's image; that supreme and eternal being is to them incapable of representation and without end. Therefore they set up no statues in their cities, still less in their temples; this flattery is not paid their kings, nor this honor given to the Caesars." Tacitus considered the Jews indolent because they rested every seventh day. And he added, misleadingly: "After a while they were led by the charms of indolence to give over the seventh year as well to inactivity."

And so, when the Passover pilgrims made their way to the Temple or pitched their city of tents under the scornful eyes of the Roman soldiery they must have been aware of the disparaging things that were being said about them. May not Jesus and his parents have overheard these remarks as well? When Jesus came down from the Mount of Olives and found himself under the watch of the Tower of Antonia, did he not become immediately aware of the clash between Israel and its proud pagan conquerors?

Still we may presume that his first impression was one of wonder at the Temple. The construction of this splendid and majestic building, the "navel of the universe," required, we are told, the labor of 250,000 men over a period of eight years; it was 105 feet long, 37 feet wide and 52 feet high. The façade, which was the first thing to present itself to Jesus' sight, was in Greek rather than Hebrew style, flanked by two porches, one known

for legendary reasons as "Solomon's porch" (St. John 10: 23; Acts 3:11; 5:12); the other as the "royal cloister," the latter composed of 162 Corinthian columns, set out in four rows and three aisles.

As he entered the building the young Jesus must have taken in its theological implications. At this time, when Israel possessed the only monotheistic religion, its wise men proceeded, scrupulously and yet broadmindedly, to define its relationship to the pagan world. Tolerance and hierarchy were the practical aspects of their belief. They excluded no one from salvation, but involved all men, including pagans and unbelievers, in humanity's march toward the advent of the Messiah. Israel has never held that infidels must be converted in order to have a place in God's plan. As the prophet Isaiah said: "Mine house shall be an house of prayer unto all people."

But tolerance does not imply sloppiness or confusion. Respect for the moral law may suffice for the attainment of salvation, but it does not mean that all men are called upon to accomplish the same duties and the same religious mission. There is a gradation or hierarchy of privileges and duties. Israel is a people of priests, whose every thought and action are dedicated to the glory of God, but there are other categories of men, less strict in their observances, like the members of a "Third Order," who serve as intermediaries between Jews and idolaters. There are *gerim* or proselytes, the *ger ha-sha-ar*, a proselyte "of the gate" who follows the Jewish rites only from a distance, but observes the moral law and the *ger-zaddik*, a "righteous" or more committed proselyte, who plays a greater part in the life of the community and

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accomplishes certain of its rites. And so all men who live as they should are drawn into the march toward salvation, taking their place, each according to his lights, around this people of priests, this people of Israel.

The Temple of Jerusalem had a layout which reflected this order of things. Between the Greek façade and the innermost sanctuary, devoid of ornaments and images, there was a series of "courts," accessible to various categories of people. There was the court of the Gentiles, open to foreigners and pagans, the court of Israel, with a section reserved for women, and finally the court of the priests. The Temple area was open to everybody; it was the spiritual center of the city and the nation.

Between the court of the Gentiles and the court of Israel there was a stone lattice work with tablets forbidding the uncircumcised to pass within the sacred enclosures. The sanctuary itself was composed of three parts, indicative of various degrees of submission to God. First the "Vestibule," whose name is self-explanatory; then the "Holy" place; then the "Holy of Holies." The "Holy" place, separated from the "Vestibule" by four-colored curtains (symbolic of the four elements), was where the priests conducted worship and offered sacrifices; in it were the altar of perfumes or altar of gold, the seven-branched candlestick and the table for display of the unleavened shewbread. The "Holy of Holies" contained the Ark of the Covenant, a chest two cubits and a half in length made of acacia wood, overlaid with gold, and topped by a gold lid, the "mercy-seat." The doors of the Holy of Holies were sealed; on only one day of the year, Yom Kippur or Day of Atonement, did the

High Priest enter and accomplish a rite which is still described in the service of our own times:

The faithful ones separated the High Priest one week before the tenth day . . . The water of purification was sprinkled upon him, and each day he sprinkled the blood, burned incense and trimmed the lamps that he might become accustomed to the sacred service . . .

On the dawn of the ninth day they escorted him to the eastern gate, and some of the beautiful sacrifices of the Day of Atonement passed before him. Toward sunset the meal that was prepared for him was frugal, that his sleep might be calm; the aged men of his tribe led him forth to instruct him in taking his hands full of incense, and they charged him . . . to raise the pillar of incense within the Holy of Holies . . . He shed tears that his zeal should be doubted; they also shed tears; they sought . . . by expounding the Law and by reading Holy Writ to keep him wakeful until midnight . . . They to whom the first lot fell removed the ashes from the altar; the second lot was cast for the removal of the ashes from the altar of incense and from the lamp; the third lot . . . for one that should assist at the offering of incense; and for the arrangement of the members of the sacrifice was the fourth lot cast. As the watchman proclaimed the dawn of day, they spread a veil of fine linen to conceal him; he put off his clothes, bathed, and put on the golden garments; he stood and laved his hands and feet and performed the first part of the . . . morning . . . burnt offering. He appointed another to complete it; he

then went to burn incense and to trim the lamps, to offer the burnt offering and to pour out a drink offering. Then spread they again the linen veil; he then entered the chamber of Parvah, he laved his hands and feet and put off his golden garments. He went forth and bathed, and put on the white garments, and laved his hands and feet. These garments were made of fine linen from Pelusium, of the value of eighteen manim . . . fit for him that ministered unto the King of glory. The High Priest's bullock was placed between the porch and the altar, facing the west, with its head turned toward the south. He drew nigh unto it and, laying his hands upon its head, made confession of his transgressions, concealing naught in his bosom.

And thus did he say: "O GOD, I have sinned, I have committed iniquity, I have transgressed against thee, I and my household. I beseech thee by thy NAME, make thou atonement for the sins and for the iniquities and for the transgressions, wherein I have sinned and committed iniquity and transgressed against thee, I and my household; as it is written in the Law of thy servant Moses at thy glorious command: For on this day atonement shall be made for you, to cleanse you; from all your sins, before the LORD."

And when the priests and the people that stood in the court heard the glorious and awful Name pronounced out of the mouth of the High Priest in holiness and in purity, they knelt and prostrated themselves . . . saying: "Blessed be his glorious, sovereign NAME for ever and ever."

*And he, in awe, prolonged the utterance of the Name, until they that said the blessing had ended it; to whom he said: "Ye shall be clean."*

We may imagine then that on the tenth day of the month of Tishri, the Day of Atonement, four or five hundred thousand people from all over the country stood outside the Temple while twenty thousand priests, divided into twenty-four watches, officiated within. The thoughts of all of them were with the High Priest as, on this one day of the year, he stood alone before God and trembling pronounced His name.

As the Passover pilgrims, mindful of the Atonement ceremonial, walked through the successive courts of the Temple, each of them one remove farther from the world of man and closer to God, they must have felt a deepening awe and reverence although, as we shall see, they only imperfectly succeeded in banishing all profane thoughts from their minds.

Certainly after the village synagogue to which he was accustomed, Jesus must have found the size of the Temple, "the visible expression of a whole people's faith," quite overwhelming. The Temple was the center of both national and religious life; in both Exodus (23:17) and Deuteronomy (16:16) the Jews were ordered to appear before God in a place of His choosing three times a year. In the month of Adar, just before the Passover, every Jew except the priests had to pay to the Temple a didrachmon, or half a silver shekel, of tribute money. At Jesus' time the doctors were still discussing at what age children should attend its functions.

Worship in the Temple had none of the intimate or educational character of that of the synagogue. It consisted primarily of sacrifice, and there were no provisions for the teaching of the Law. According to the *midrashim* the Temple was half earthly, half heavenly in nature; it was at the meeting point of two horizons, one immanent, one transcendent. The Temple of Jerusalem, the Temple built in Eretz Israel, on the rocky, muddy, earthy "promised land," was a counterpart of the inaccessible sanctuary which the Messiah might be on the point of approaching. According to the second-century Rabbi Simeon ben Johai, when man builds a perfect monument here on earth it is recreated in heaven.

The splendor of the Temple, the crowds inside and around it, the majestic character of its sacrifices and the otherworldliness of its worship could not fail to impress pilgrims from the provinces, the young Jesus of Nazareth among them. But for Israel there can be no uplift without downfall, no exultation untinged by regret. This is perhaps the consequence of its fundamental paradox, its earthly incarnation of a divinely inspired destiny. This magnificent edifice, consecrated to the highest purpose conceived by man, was made of gross stone and by human hands, with all their connotations of impurity.

To Israel there was already something scandalous about building in space. The Jews' vocation is to build in time; their true temples are in the human heart and co-substantial with history, never finished and indeed owing their endurance to this very incompleteness. They convey tradition without either freezing or interrupting it, without coinciding and perishing with a single one of

time's fleeting moments. Jewry's true monuments, as we shall see later on, are continuous commentaries of the word of God.

The origin of the Temple, this magnificent edifice which at the same time expresses and consolidates Israel's love for the Creator in a way contrary to the earliest tradition, goes back to the crucial episode of the worship of the Calf of Gold. It was after this idolatry and in order to prevent its recurrence that the Children of Israel were ordered to make a tabernacle and build a temple to house it. The *midrash* states this quite clearly: "Lord of the world, earthly kings have palaces, where there are tables and candlesticks and other symbols which make for recognition of their royal status. And you, our liberator and savior, would you not have some sign of royalty, so that all the inhabitants of earth may recognize you as King?"

When Solomon finally built this spatial dwelling, so little in keeping with the essential infinity of God, he had to overcome all sorts of resistance. First, the resistance of men, for he had to call upon non-Jewish, Phoenician workers. And second, what we may call the resistance of God, that is, if we explore the meaning of the strange verse of Chronicles (II, 6:18): "But will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have built!"

This hesitation or scrupulosity on God's part has left its mark on the conscience of Israel. There is no certainty that the Unspeakable, Invisible, Elusive One, in spite of all the precautions with which the liturgy hedged him

about, was truly at ease in the Temple. Flavius Josephus (*The Jewish War*, VI, 299), corroborated by Tacitus (V, 13) recounts a surprising incident in this connection. A few years before the destruction of the Temple by fire, "At the feast of Pentecost, when the priests had gone into the Inner Temple at night to perform the usual ceremonies, they declared that they were aware, first of a violent movement and a loud crash, then of a concerted cry: 'Let us go hence!' The voice was that of the God of Israel, who refused to let himself be enclosed in stone walls."

The very fact of construction, of an attempt to isolate a unit of the immense space created by God and thus to check the flow of time, was to the Jew of this period shocking and almost idolatrous. Is there not a connection here with the punishment which God brought down upon the builders of the Tower of Babel? A well-known *midrash* furnishes us this explanation. During the construction of the Tower a man fell from the scaffolding and was killed. The builders were so obsessed by their desire to finish this monument to their fame that they ordered the body to be taken away without a pause in the work. A few days later a segment of the wall crumbled, and the consequent disruption of their schedule and loss of money disturbed them far more than the death of one of their workers. Perhaps this was the reason why God visited such a dramatic punishment upon them.

This is an unusual case, but the fact remains that every Jew is ill at ease when it comes to consecrating a finite building to the infinite God. The Torah bears out

his fear, for in Exodus (20:25) God says to Moses: "And if thou wilt make me an altar of stone, thou shalt not build it of hewn stone; for if thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it."

The gleaming white stones with which Herod the Great had ornamented the Temple, no matter how they may have dazzled the young Jesus' eyes, had been hewn by men's hands and thereby subjected to profanation. The rebuilt sanctuary, in spite of its splendor, the vicissitudes through which it had lived and the people's attachment to it, aroused mingled feelings among them. "The very magnificence of the monument," says Adolphe Lods, "must have shocked rather than pleased such Israelites as had clung to the simple traditions of the original cult of Jehovah . . . Its elaborate construction, in gold and cedar, was tantamount to a deliberate abandonment of the old-time religion . . . It must have seemed like an attempt to make a synthesis of the faith of Jehovah, symbolized by the Ark of the Covenant, and various foreign cults, particularly those of the Phoenicians." For the colonnades and the outer decorations of the Temple were certainly not Jewish in character.

It is difficult to imagine the complex feelings of the young boy of Nazareth when he made this first pilgrimage to Jerusalem. In his village he had been accustomed, every month, to see fires lit on the surrounding hills to announce the coming of the new moon, and he knew that this signal was one link in a chain originated on the Mount of Olives by the priests of the Temple. Until his thirteenth year and this visit to the capital, these fires had been the chief bond to the sanc-

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tuary. The Temple had been not only the center of the world, the earthly habitation of the historical God; it was also, quite visibly, the center of light, the determinant of the calendar.

And when he finally arrived in this place of mystery he found it guarded by Roman soldiers, surrounded by merchants and decked with foreign ornamentation. What a shock to his youthfully ingenuous sensitivity! What bitterness there must have been in his heart! Such a traumatic experience must have played a large part in his spiritual evolution.

# 6.

## The Young Jesus among the Doctors

THE holiday crowd milling through the city streets and the courts of the Temple was not composed only of believers. Every religion numbers men who pay little heed—except on special occasions—to its ordinances: Jews who feel obliged to fast on Yom Kippur in order to join in the prayer for the dead; Christians who observe Good Friday and Easter, even if they do not set foot in church during the rest of the year. In Jerusalem, where the circumstances of the occupation caused Romans, Greeks and Jews to find themselves together, there were, then, atheists, skeptics and violators of the law. In this last category, the German historian, Graetz, tells us, "there were avaryanim, or 'sinners,' whose religious transgressions had excluded them from society and who were either unable or unwilling to return. There were 'publicans,' or tax-collectors, at whom all Jewish patriots looked askance because they had turned their backs on

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the Law and chosen to lead a depraved life on the gains they made in the service of Rome. There was also a group of petty artisans, servants and farm laborers, who rarely came to Jerusalem or listened, even without understanding, to the doctrines of their faith."

During the Passover celebration such lost sheep must have passed by or even entered the Temple, where they heard the echo of prayers which they had long since forgotten or even imagined that, by their passive presence, they were taking part in the outpourings of the faithful. It was among a motley crowd of this description that Mary and Joseph must have led Jesus as they made their way to the vicinity of the sanctuary. Here also that they looked for him, at first in vain, and then, after three days found him "sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions."

When the young Jesus came for the first time since he was a baby to the Temple he passed through this crowd of tepid believers but he did not linger among them. The doctors welcomed him as a boy preparing for his bar-mitzvah or religious initiation. To this custom there is an important and almost contemporary witness. The Hellenized Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus, who was born a short time after Jesus' death, tells in his autobiography that when he himself was sixteen years old he started to explore the spiritual currents of his time. He studied the opinions of the three principal Jewish sects, the Pharisees, the Sadducees and the Essenes (he makes no mention of the overeager Zealots), in order, as he says, "that I should be in a position to select the best." Even before this, at the time of his

religious initiation, he tells us, "the chief priests and leading men of the city used constantly to come to me for precise information on some particular in our ordinances."

We may conclude that at Jesus' time the doctors welcomed any boy of his age, either to test his knowledge or to let him share one of the incessant dialogues about the Law, so essential a part of the Jewish religion, in which he was not a mere listener but was entitled to express an opinion. The doctors were not dictatorial dogmatists but guides and partners in the "open forum" of rabbinical tradition.

But exactly who were these doctors? Did they belong to the same sect as those who questioned Flavius Josephus, twenty-five years later? Probably not, for the two boys were of very different origins. Flavius Josephus was an aristocrat, and proud of it; among his ancestors there were high priests and kings, and his father was known all over Jerusalem for his noble lineage and his love of justice. He himself had no need to work for a living. In leisurely fashion he completed his studies, examined the possibilities of finding something to interest him in Jerusalem, then lived for three years, with a certain Bannos, "who dwelt in the wilderness, wearing only such clothing as trees provided, feeding on such things as grew of themselves and using frequent ablutions of cold water, by day and night, for purity's sake." After this voluntary taste of asceticism Flavius Josephus returned to everyday life and at twenty-six years of age, in the course of a trip to Rome, was introduced to the Emperor Nero's wife, Poppaea.

A boy so well-born and well-connected would not have been received in the Temple in the same everyday way as Jesus. The "chief priests and leading men" to whom he refers were doubtless Sadducees. By birth and rank he was entitled to their favor. Young Jesus of Nazareth, on the other hand, would have held no interest for them whatsoever. They would have been too busy with the Passover rites and sacrifices to receive him.

Jesus, as we know, came before doctors skilled in the knowledge and dialectic of the Law and endowed with a rich spiritual life but not with a high social standing. In accord with the rabbinical tradition, he was to address himself particularly to the poor and humble. Meanwhile we may wonder who were these doctors who found time during the Passover celebration to question and answer an unknown young boy, to deepen his understanding of the religion of Israel and to awaken in him, perhaps, a consciousness of his mission. To what sect did they belong?

The sects of Jesus' time were spiritual parties within the framework of Judaism. They all had the same dogma, worship and historical tradition, and differed only in the emphasis which they placed upon certain external manifestations of their common faith. The two sects which differed most in their practices were the Zealots, who were highly organized and went in for political action, and the Essenes, who were most spiritual and cultivated contemplation. To neither one of these is it likely that the doctors who received Jesus in the Temple belonged.

The Zealots believed in bringing about the Messianic age by force; they were fanatical nationalists, who did

not hesitate to mingle piety with violence. The other sects, particularly the Pharisees, believed in the advent of the Messiah, but their belief was a pious hope rather than a call to action. They looked for Israel's deliverance in the strict observation of the Law; obedience to the commandments and the accomplishment of the prescribed prayers and ceremonies were the only steps they took to bring about the Kingdom of Heaven. The Pharisees were mystics and intellectuals, and the Zealots must have branded them as ineffective. A hundred years after Jesus' death, in their attempt to force God's hand, the Zealots fostered a Messianic king, Simeon Bar-Kokhba, who had only one Pharisee, Rabbi Akiba, for a supporter. No Zealots, then, would have received Jesus in the Temple at Jerusalem, whose clergy was, if not designated, at least accepted and watched over by the Romans.

For opposite reasons it is unlikely that the doctors belonged to the contemplative sect of the Essenes, who had shut themselves off from their countrymen and the capital city and withdrawn to primitive monasteries on the west shore of the Dead Sea. Although their beliefs, including that in the immortality of the soul, were similar to those of the Pharisees, their way of life was entirely different. They formed a sort of secret society whose rites were open only to initiates.

There remain, then, the Sadducees and the Pharisees, both of whom might have been present in the Temple during the holy days and have received a newcomer. But their attitudes were not at all the same. The Sad-

ducees disapproved of nonconformity in politics, philosophy or religion. Politically, they adapted themselves quite successfully to the Roman occupation and even to the interference with Temple affairs. Although Herod had conferred the priesthood upon nomads from outside Palestine who were the docile instruments of his will and had filled forced vacancies on the Sanhedrin with priests imported from Alexandria, the Sadducees did not hesitate to worship beside them. They did not look down upon the language and culture of the Greeks which, according to Flavius Josephus, most Jews of Jesus' time considered as suited only to slaves. The Talmud forbade speaking Greek and those who spoke it automatically cut themselves off from the faith. Besides, a good Jew had no time for such study. A Pharisee, tempted by modernism, is said to have asked a rabbi whether his son could learn Greek. And the rabbi answered: "Why not? But our sages recommend spending all day and all night in the study of the Torah. Try to find an hour which belongs neither to night nor to day."

The Sadducees, having adapted themselves to the civilization of the conquerors, did not hesitate to learn Greek or Latin. But when it came to religion they held out for the naked text of the Scriptures and refused to admit the tradition of exegesis and interpretation. The Pharisees, on the contrary, proclaimed themselves to be nonconformists. Their Hebrew name is *Perushim*, which means "the separated ones," separated from the higher-ups of either government or clergy. They were of pure Jewish, lower-class origin and infused with a liberal

spirit; instead of keeping to the letter of the Law they were the initiators of the rabbinical commentaries, both Talmud and *midrashim*. Since they were unprejudiced and at the same time patriotic, they did not boycott the national and religious institution of the Temple, but preferred the more easygoing and democratic synagogue, which was indeed their contribution to Judaism. It seems likely that they gathered in the synagogue which, as we have said above, formed within the Temple itself an island of simple, unofficial piety, and it is here that they may very well have received Jesus.

We cannot say that the doctors mentioned in the Gospel according to Saint Luke included no Sadducees, but we can be reasonably sure that Pharisees constituted the majority among them. First, on the supposition which we have hazarded above, that they were the group most likely to receive a mere carpenter's son. And second, because of the echoes of their doctrine which we find in Jesus' own teaching. In spite of the fact that Jesus' disciples frequently clashed with the Pharisees, they had an obvious influence upon him. As we shall see later, many sentences in the Talmud are to be found in the Gospels.

Toward the Romans the Pharisees' attitude was one of compromise; they refused either to serve or to combat them. This position is close to that which Jesus expressed in his famous saying: "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's . . ." Flavius Josephus' comparison between the Sadducees and the Pharisees gives further evidence of the relationship of the latters' doctrine to the preaching of Jesus:

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The Pharisees, are held to be the most authoritative exponents of the Law . . . They ascribe everything to Fate or to God: the decision whether or not to do right rests mainly with men, but in every action Fate takes some part. Every soul is incorruptible, but only the souls of good men pass into other bodies, the souls of bad men being subjected to eternal punishment.

(On this last point, that of eternal punishment, Flavius Josephus has, as we shall see, misinterpreted the rabbis.)

The doctors, whom we may identify, along general lines, with the Pharisees, in their attitude toward the Romans, the priestly clan and the political activists, exercised their influence from the Temple synagogue, which they had made into a center of religious purity and intellectual freedom. It was doubtless among them that Jesus spent the three days when his parents could not find him, discussing the Scriptures and their rabbinical comments.

How, then, did this early affinity turn into dissension, until the name of Pharisee, which Jesus respected when he was a boy, became an object of scorn for him and his disciples? Was it by virtue of a misunderstanding or as the result of a process of natural and logical evolution? In order to resolve this enigma we must examine more closely the behavior of the Pharisees in Jesus' time.

There were Pharisees and Pharisees, and the discredit into which the whole sect fell was probably due to a

minority of its followers. At just this time, the beginning of the Christian era, the Pharisees, in a self-critical mood, differentiated in the Talmud between the good and the bad among their number. With often biting humor they listed seven categories, to six of which they gave picturesque nicknames which justified their bad reputation.

There are, the Talmud says, seven kinds of Pharisees:

- 1) The "Broad-shouldered," who carry their religious duties on their backs, ostentatiously;
- 2) The "Stumblers," who with excessive humility knock their feet together;
- 3) The "Head-bangers," who look down at the ground in order not to see passing women and bang their heads against a wall;
- 4) The "Pestles," who bend over double as they walk;
- 5) Those that say: "Tell me what is my duty, so I may go and perform it";
- 6) Those that do good out of fear;
- 7) Those that do good out of love.

We can imagine how a Rabelais, a Molière or even a Pascal might savor the caustic quality of the description of the first six categories. Among the good Pharisees of the time there were those that anticipated the judgment passed by the Talmud and denounced their unworthy fellows. Rabbi Nachman says: "The High Court will punish those hypocrites who wrap themselves up in their

prayer shawls in order to pose as true Pharisees, when they are nothing of the sort." Another adversary of the sect, Alexander Jannaeus, said, when dying, to his wife: "Have no fear of true Pharisees or of those who are not Pharisees at all, but be careful of 'painted Pharisees,' who are pretending to be what they are not."

The fact that this "painting" or pretense was spread quite unequally through the sect is shown not only by Jewish texts but by Christian ones as well. If we look carefully at the Gospels we shall see that they make the same distinction between "good" Pharisees and "bad" ones. We find, of course, the appellation "generation of vipers" and many more, but other Gospel passages show us Pharisees of a deserving kind. Saint Luke, for instance, (13:31-33), pays tribute to those who sought to protect Jesus from the wrath of Herod:

*The same day there came certain of the Pharisees, saying unto him, Get thee out, and depart hence: for Herod will kill thee.*

*And he said unto them: Go ye, and tell that fox, Behold, I cast out devils, and I do cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I shall be perfected.*

*Nevertheless I must walk today and tomorrow: for it cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem.*

The Pharisees' good intentions bore no fruit, but it is noteworthy that they rose to defend Christ against the king who was a notorious collaborator of the pagans. And in the Acts of the Apostles we find two episodes in

which the Pharisees are cast in a favorable light. First, when the Sanhedrin had gathered together to condemn the apostles (5:34-39):

Then stood there up one in the council, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the apostles forth a little space;

And he said unto them [of the Sanhedrin], Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do as touching these men.

For before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody; to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves; who was slain; and all, even as many as obeyed him, were scattered and brought to nought.

After this man rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after him; he also perished; and all, even as many as obeyed him, were dispersed.

And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought:

But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.

And to him they agreed . . .

After this scene, where spirituality wins out over legalism, the Acts of the Apostles show us Saint Paul before the Sanhedrin, where the Pharisees take his side

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and he distinguishes them from the Sadducees and professes to belong to their number (23:6-10):

But when Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question.

And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees: and the multitude was divided.

For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both.

And there arose a great cry: and the scribes that were of the Pharisees' part arose, and strove, saying, We find no evil in this man: but if a spirit or an angel hath spoken to him, let us not fight against God.

And when there arose a great dissension, the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them, commanded the soldiers to go down, and to take him by force from among them, and to bring him into the castle.<sup>1</sup>

And so the Talmud on the one hand and Saint Luke and the Acts on the other, no matter how diversely they judge the Pharisees, agree not to put them all in the same category. The Talmud praises those who were faithful to their religion, one category out of seven, but perhaps the most numerous and certainly the most rep-

<sup>1</sup> In Acts 26:5 and Philippians 3:5, St. Paul also presents himself as a Pharisee.

resentative. The New Testament, quite naturally, is indulgent toward those who seem to be forerunners of allies of Christianity. Perhaps the same spiritual values were involved, with different applications, or perhaps there was not then the chasm between Judaism and Christianity which has come into being through centuries of debate and persecution. In any case the Pharisees, or certain ones among them, represented the best and most generous of Jewish traditions, although under particular historical circumstances their very virtues lent themselves to dislike. How did it happen that the Pharisees won such praise, only to become the objects of misunderstanding?

The Pharisees stood for all that was liberal and at the same time for all that was uncompromising in the Jewish religion of their time. To a modern mind these two terms may seem contradictory, but this was not the case in the religious atmosphere of two thousand years ago.

To the Pharisees a revealed text, although it could not be tampered with, was nevertheless subject to commentary and explanation. We have only to recall the midrash which shows Moses on Mount Sinai receiving God's law and at the same time looking into the future and seeing all the commentaries that will be made upon it, many of them stemming from civilizations which he cannot conceive and phrased in languages which he does not know. Yet he gives full powers to his remotest descendants and declares himself in accord with the future reverberations of his word, even if they are incomprehensible to him. In consenting to interpretations at

whose spirit he could guess but whose literal meaning must escape him, Moses was acting like a Pharisee.

At the same time the Pharisees were in a way, quite literally, the first freethinkers. But at a period when the whole universe still had a sacred character their free-thinking was bound up with their religion; it was made manifest not in denial of the faith but in commentaries which elaborated upon it. This is the origin of those two monuments of Judaism, the Talmud and the midrash. The Pharisees engaged ceaselessly in the exegesis of the Torah. They would not allow it to be monopolized by the priests, but adapted it to the social and individual needs of that ordinary yet extraordinary creature, man, subject to eternity, yet living in history. In so doing they multiplied the applications of God's law.

The philosophy of the Pharisees was human not only in its origins but in its consequences as well. They were all gentleness and charity toward their fellow men, ceaselessly preaching that everyone must love his neighbor like himself. In their view there was no sin which could not be forgiven, no eternal punishment. When the Talmud takes up the question of punishments in the next world it limits their duration and proportions as nearly as possible to the gravity of the sin, as if on the part of some earthly tribunal. The maximum term is one year. Pharisee sages always set forth the possibility of divine pardon. They taught that God was merciful toward a sincerely repentant sinner, not out of weakness but out of understanding of the true nature of mercy. For the essence of repentance and forgiveness is not simply the cancellation of a debt; it is the renewal of personal re-

lations between the soul and God, of the harmony which sin has broken.

This human and generous conception of the relations between God and man was paralleled by one equally broad of the relations between one man and another. Pharisaic morality was deeply committed to freedom, in the most enduring and modern sense of the word; one might call it close to the "personalism" of today. It affirmed the primacy of the human person in its double reality, individual and communal. The human person was not to be submitted to the arithmetical laws by which there is superiority in numbers and a majority decision obliterates private opinion. Every soul was autonomous, every mind independent.

The Mishnah, that first written expression of oral rabbinical tradition, states the reason why no opinion, however isolated, can be overlooked. It is "in order that, if circumstances make it necessary, a court can use it as the basis of support of a judgment." Hillel, who, as we shall see later on, represented the best qualities of the Pharisees and antedated those of the Christians, came out with a precept inimical to hasty and preconceived notions of justice: "Do not judge your neighbor until you have been in the same situation as he." (*Pirke Abot*, II, 4.) The Pharisee doctors pushed freedom of opinion as far as it could go. No idea could be more truly revolutionary than this one of a Pharisee rabbi: "Disobedience to a precept with the intention of serving God is better than obedience without any such intention." Where, in all this, is the narrow ritualism habitually attributed to the Pharisees?

Their respect for individual freedom was incarnated in a communal institution particularly suited to their temperament, the synagogue, a house of prayer where any one of the faithful could conduct the service and interpret the law, as did Jesus, Saint Paul and the first Christians.

The Synagogue and the Talmud were, then, the framework and the written expression of the Pharisees' love of freedom. It has been said of the Talmud that it kept the spirit of Israel alive when the people themselves were prevented from carrying out their historical mission. In the same way the synagogues were spiritual refuges and sanctuaries, where the Pharisees maintained the traditions of liberty and justice. And yet, by a paradox which the modern mind may find unnecessarily difficult to accept, these Pharisees who were the most liberal of the Jews of their time were also the most strict in their religious observances.

To the Pharisees, every Jew, as a result of the Covenant, was a priest and the whole world had a sacred character. "Ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation," says one of the most moving verses of Exodus. Of course, ever since the Creation, man had been bound to the universe in which God manifested Himself. Hence the importance of every word, every letter of the Scriptures, which lend themselves to infinite commentary, since in them the Eternal God shows Himself forth *leolam vahed*, at all times and in all places. Hence also the importance of every human action, which has power to either strengthen or weaken the harmony of the universe, the weightiness of every

commandment and the culpability of every error in its interpretation.

In this sacred universe, where every word expresses God and every gesture may serve to carry out His will, every sentence, every action has a significance almost like that of the liturgy of the Catholic Mass or the motions of the priest during its celebration. But whereas, for the Christian, this sanctification of word and deed culminates in the mystery of the Mass, for the Jew there is no one culminating point. At every moment of his life, in every place of his earthly pilgrimage the Jew belongs to a sacred universe of which he is both the witness and the priest. Hence the importance of the detailed study of the Torah and its application. As Monsignor Ricciotti has put it: "It was from tradition that the Pharisees derived the doctrines which the Sadducees had rejected. Since the study of the Law, particularly the oral Law, was the Jew's most stringent duty and noblest occupation they dedicated their whole time to it."

They had been told also that "the study of the Torah is something greater than the building of the Temple . . . or the veneration for a father or mother," (*Megillah*, 16 b), that "a man must not abandon the house of study (of the Law) even at the hour of his death." (*Shabbat*, 13 b.)

Here we have the reason for the high standards of the Pharisees. Where there was true belief in the sacred character of the world and the ministry of man, these standards had a compelling necessity about them. But where, on the other hand, a Pharisee had lost his faith and simply went through its motions, the result was an

empty ritualism. There was an immense number of Pharisee prescriptions, six hundred and thirteen in all, three hundred and sixty-five (as many as the days of the year) negative and two hundred and forty-eight (as many as the muscles of the human body) positive. Their general purpose was to keep man faithful to the Covenant, and the thousand links of this network had some reason for being as long as they enclosed something of a universe which was looked upon as divine.

But when, under Roman influence, the Jewish world began to lose its sacred character and the Jewish religion, heretofore pure, turned to idolatry, then the spontaneity and sincerity of the Pharisees started to become arbitrary and artificial. A change of this kind was in the air, perceptible to Jewish society as a whole and to the most sensitive of the Pharisees in particular, in Jesus' time.

This, perhaps, was the basis of the misunderstanding to which the Pharisees lent themselves, the reason for the divergence between Jesus and some of their number. A divergence which no one could have foreseen and for which neither party was really responsible, since the real responsibility lies with the Romans, whose presence around the Temple and interference in Jewish religious life had broken the sacred harmony of the world in which Jesus had been brought up, the world in which Israel had played out its destiny for two thousand years.

The presence of Roman paganism and rationalism at the very gates of the sanctuary so transformed the atmosphere in which the Pharisees were engaged in following and elaborating the word of God that it made

their whole way of life seem paralyzed and anachronistic. If Jesus, in the course of his preaching, broke away from the Pharisees and his disciples disputed with them, the fault was that of the centurion who on holy days mounted guard over the sanctuary, of Herod, who submitted the list of the Temple clergy to Roman approval, of the Hellenized Jews who, thinking that God could be reconciled with Caesar, had insinuated themselves into all the courts of the Temple, those reserved for Jews and non-Jews alike.

True Pharisees were quite aware of the threat which the occupation forces represented to the religion of Israel. One of them took refuge in a cave in order to escape the profane world of the conquerors. "He was repulsed by the calculating and utilitarian spirit of Roman civilization."

When the twelve-year-old Jesus lingered for three days with the doctors, probably in the synagogue of the Temple, things had not yet come to this pass. The conflict which was to set him and his disciples against the Pharisees had not yet consciously developed. Yet the young Nazarene must have found the atmosphere of the Temple quite different from that of the house of prayer to which he was accustomed in his native place. There were some resemblances, to be sure, which made the Temple synagogue not entirely unfamiliar to him. For one thing it was surrounded by study rooms, to which Jesus, as a candidate for bar-mitzvah, was automatically admitted. The blessings sung during the services were those he already knew, and the doctors, when they were

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at their devotions, wore the same prayer shawl as Joseph, or the rabbi of Nazareth, or the *hazzan*, the cantor, who had perhaps taught Jesus the rudiments of the Law.

But outside this familiar framework Jerusalem teemed with a whole world of things which Jesus did not know. Everywhere the Romans made a show of their power. And the talk he heard around him was not all in the familiar Aramaic tongue; it was also in Hebrew, the language of the intellectuals, and in Greek and Latin, as spoken by the pagan conquerors.

It would be impossible or at the very least ill-advised, in speaking of this critical episode of the hidden years, to reconstruct what Jesus said to the doctors which, according to St. Luke, so greatly astonished them. We can reconstruct with greater accuracy what the doctors said to him, or rather the sort of thing they were saying at this period. There are sayings, known to be of the contemporary Pharisees, which were in the air, in the air of this time, pregnant with the future, when Jesus made the first public showing of his vocation.

The doctors, many of them, had qualities which he could not have failed to appreciate. We have seen that they affirmed the primacy of the spirit in the face of Roman materialism; we have seen that they were liberal and indulgent, that they proclaimed and applied the law of love. Most of them were also aware of Jewish universalism and refused to exclude other peoples and religions from the salvation to be brought to earth by the coming of God's kingdom. "Is it not noteworthy," writes Rabbi Elie Benamozegh, the nineteenth-century Jewish thinker, "that in the days of Caligula, Tiberius and

Nero the Pharisees should have debated the question of whether a pagan, faithful to his own religion, could be saved as long as he confessed the Creator and led a good life? And over the centuries this broad, affirmative doctrine has prevailed, so that today every Jew must believe that Marcus Aurelius occupies just as much of a place in Paradise as Isaac and Moses." Indeed, the Pharisees went so far as to say that a good pagan might be the equal or even the superior of the high priest of Jerusalem.

This broad-mindedness did not reflect a lukewarm faith. The very Pharisees who offered to share Israel's prerogatives with other peoples were ready to die heroically for their beliefs. Less than ten years after the Crucifixion large numbers of Jews boldly faced a martyr's death when the Emperor Caligula tried to place a statue in the Temple of Jerusalem.

"From towns and villages," writes the Israeli historian, Klausner, "thousands upon thousands of Jews came to the plain of Acre, where the Roman envoy, Petronius, was encamped with his army. Prostrating themselves upon the ground, with a rare mixture of humility and courage, they said that he must either refrain from putting a human image in the Temple or else kill them, then and there, to the last one."

Among these thousands of Jews, faithful at the price of their life to the Torah, may not there have been some who had received their religious instruction from the same doctors as Jesus? Surely we cannot dismiss the Pharisees as mere narrow ritualists. Among the doctors

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there must have been a spiritual atmosphere such as to stimulate the young Jesus' Messianic vocation.

At the same time the doctors carried on minute analysis and discussion, which were responsible for both the vitality and the danger of paralysis inherent in the Pharisees' religion. When Jesus came to the Temple there were two rival schools of thought: those of Hillel and Shammai, both of whom died at just about this date. Hillel the Elder, or the Great, was the head of an academy which existed in Jerusalem between 40 B.C. and A.D. 10. In opposition to this *Bet* (House of) *Hillel*, there was the *Bet Shammai*, which represented a divergent branch of Pharisaic doctrine. When Jesus met the doctors, the memory of these two schools was still fresh, and disciples continued to spread their teachings. But whatever their divergences, Hillel and Shammai both represented the Talmudic tradition, which goes all the way back to Moses. This is how the *Pirke Abot* presents their common genealogy:

Moses received the Torah on Sinai and handed it down to Joshua; Joshua gave it to the elders; the elders to the prophets; and the prophets handed it down to the men of the Great Assembly. They said three things: Be deliberate in judgment; raise up many disciples; and build a fence around the Torah . . .

Shemaya and Abtalyon received the tradition . . . The former said: "Love work, hate domination, and seek no undue intimacy with the ruling power." The latter said: "Ye sages be heedful of your words, lest your

disciples be misled and the name of Heaven be profaned."

*Hillel and Shammai received the tradition from them . . . (Abot, 1-12).*

Coming from the same line and nourished by the same sources the two doctors brought different temperaments to their doctrinal interpretations. Both of them, faithful to Pharisaic philosophy, tried to formulate it in a kindly and indulgent manner. Of Hillel's teaching we have many examples, which we shall quote below. Shammai has been too often described as his complete opposite; it is unjust to consider him for this reason narrow and sectarian. Here is how the *Pirke Abot* quotes him: "Set a fixed time for the study of the Torah; say little and do much; and receive all men with a cheerful countenance."

But according to later writers, and perhaps his contemporaries as well, there were behind Shammai's smiling face a doctrinal rigor and concern with detail greater than those of any other doctor. History is given to oversimplification, and if Hillel is reputed to have been a liberal and Shammai a ritualist, it may be upon the evidence of writings chosen, in both cases, to support an a priori idea.

According to the Talmud, Shammai was intransigent even toward his own family. He wanted his son, at a tender age, to fast on the day of Yom Kippur. Later, when his daughter-in-law gave birth to a child during the feast of Tabernacles, he removed the ceiling from the room and replaced it with branches, in order that

his newborn grandson should accomplish his religious duty in the leafy "booths" or tents prescribed by Leviticus.

Hillel, on the other hand, is said to have interpreted the Law in a much more generous fashion. Hence the pupils and later followers of the two doctors were in almost constant disagreement. They disagreed, for instance, on the age at which children were to be brought to the Temple. The rabbis of the School of Shammai, says Monsignor Ricciotti, maintained that it should be as soon as they were able to sit astride their fathers' shoulders, whereas the followers of Hillel put it off until they were able to walk up the steps, holding their fathers' hands.

Another, even more characteristic discussion revolved around the conditions of admission to the two schools. According to a *baraita*, or note added to the Talmud, the pupils of Shammai were required to be "modest, intelligent, well-born and rich," whereas those of Hillel had to meet no regular requirements whatsoever, because "many sinners, once they had been instructed in the Law, became good, religious men."

The differences between the two schools, we repeat, were not in the interpretation of tradition, but simply in the characters of their leaders. This is made clear by a Talmudic story about a pagan who came asking to be instructed in the Law.

A pagan came to Shammai and said: "I'm willing to become a Jew, but you must teach me the whole of the Law while I am standing on one foot." Shammai

rapped his knuckles with a ruler and sent him away. The would-be convert then went to Hillel, who told him: "Do not unto others what you would not they do unto you. That is the whole of the Law; the rest is only commentary. Go, and learn this." (*Shabbat* 30 a.)

Hillel's reply bears a striking resemblance to that which Jesus made, according to the Gospel of Saint Mark (12:28-31), under very similar circumstances:

And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, Which is the first Commandment of all?

And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; the Lord our God is one Lord;

And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment.

And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.

It seems then that when the young Jesus came to the Temple the first question in his mind must have been not whether he should accept the teaching of the Pharisees, but rather how he should choose from the various degrees of rigor among them. The Jewish thought of his time was much concerned with this problem. The Talmud says:

For three years the schools of Hillel and Shammai disputed together, each one saying: "My word is the Law." Then a voice from Heaven said: "Both words are of the living God, but only the word of Hillel is the Law." If both words were words of God, then why was only Hillel's word worthy of being the Law? Because the followers of Hillel were gentle and patient; along with their lessons they taught the lessons of Shammai; indeed, they taught the word of Shammai before their own. Which teaches us this: he who lowers himself raises God, and he who raises himself lowers God; he who pursues greatness finds that greatness eludes him; he who runs away from greatness finds that it pursues him. (*Erubin*, 13 b.)

Were the doctors who received Jesus at the Temple disciples of Shammai or Hillel? Did he become aware at this time of the dissension between them? Obviously, we cannot know. Perhaps he met doctors of both schools, but was not shaken in his faith because he understood that different temperaments were bound to make different interpretations of the Law. One thing we can say for certain, and that is that when Jesus was found by his parents and with them left Jerusalem he had gained a complete picture of the Jewish problem of the time.

He had come in immediate contact with the rabbinical tradition of the Talmud and the Midrash. From the talk of the doctors he had gleaned certain words and phrases which he was to make his own. The reference to a "heavenly father" was one of these, and it is not sur-

prising that when his parents reproached him for having left them he said: "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?"

He had also felt at first hand the pressure of Roman paganism. These two experiences, the one of the tradition which holds Israel together, the other of the threat which, from century to century, threatens to tear it apart, were to form the temporal background of his life and teaching. We shall examine them in further detail in order to understand the awakening of his youthful mind and his growing consciousness of his predestined mission.

# 7.

## The Young Jesus and the Talmud

HERE is a rabbinic story from a much later time than that of Jesus, which enables us to penetrate the atmosphere of the Talmud, that perpetual commentary of the doctors upon the Law.

Rabbi Isaac Meir Alter of Ger, the outstanding Talmudic scholar in Poland of his day, came to his master, Rabbi Mendel of Kotzk, and asked him to read the manuscript of a work he had written. It was a commentary on *Hoshen Mishpat*, the Jewish Civil Code. A few weeks later, the Rabbi of Kotzk sent for the author. "I have studied your manuscript," he said. "It is a work of genius! When published, the classical commentaries, which have been studied for generations, will become obsolete. I am only grieved at the thought of the displeasure which this will cause to the souls of the saintly commentators." It was a winter evening. Fire was burning in the

stove. Rabbi Isaac Meir took the manuscript from the table and threw it into the flames.

In the course of history the Talmud has undergone many other burnings. But this one is particularly meaningful, inasmuch as it was voluntary and accomplished by a Jew who was a vehicle of Jewish tradition. It shows that the Talmud never has and never will come to a standstill, that it is ceaselessly in the process of creation. It is not a literary, dogmatic, philosophical or historical work, a treatise or even, in the ordinary sense of the word, a collection. Nor is it "revealed," as are to their believers, the Old and New Testaments and the Koran. It has no equivalent in any other culture or religion.

Hence the misunderstandings and errors of which it is the object, the most extreme and comical being that of the medieval cleric who wrote: ". . . *ut narrat rabbinus Talmud* (as the Rabbi Talmud tells us) . . ." The Talmud is neither a rabbi nor the work of a rabbi. The only modern way to give an approximate idea of it is to call it an "open forum," which goes back mythically to Moses, but historically to the fourth century B.C., with thousands of rabbis contributing to it over a span of nearly a thousand years.

In the beginning, between the fourth century B.C. and the second century A.D., it was an oral tradition, inscribed only in memory and passed on, mouth to mouth, from one generation to another. After this the tradition got into writing; in A.D. 189 came the first transcription, the Mishnah; then, in 396, the Talmud of Jerusalem, which included the Gemara, the first collection of commentar-

ies upon it; finally, in A.D. 500, the Talmud of Babylon, with commentaries more numerous and more important. But if by the end of the fifth century, these two Talmuds were compiled, it does not mean that the Talmudic tradition was interrupted. Wherever there were synagogues and houses of study such as, under the name of Yeshiva, still exist today, the Talmud went on. In the eleventh century a French rabbi, Rashi, wrote a commentary of the Bible and the Talmud, which was incorporated into its latest edition. In short, no matter how many times the Talmud is revised it is never definitive. It is a mental universe ingrained in Judaism, which constantly develops and renews itself, with all the fertility and diversity of life.

The unique quality of the Talmud is further shown in its page layout. In the center of every page, in large letters, is the Gemara, that is the first commentary of the originally codified Mishnah, or moral law. All around it are the doctors' subsequent glosses, sometimes longer than the original, which serve either to explain its meaning or to draw from it some theoretical or practical moral lesson. "Rabbi So-and-So says" is the way each one begins.

On account of the infinite diversity of interpretations accumulated for nearly a thousand years, it is obvious that the Talmud or Talmuds do not constitute an orderly or logical collection. There are discussions dating back hundreds of years, among hundreds of rabbis, a meeting of minds among men of different temperaments and different periods, alternately of Israel's independence and persecution. The only unifying principle—an all-impor-

tant one—is that every bit of text is the commentary of a commentary of the Torah.

This common inspiration does not do away with all differences; on every page there are varied orchestrations of the same theme. The general tone is high-minded, but occasionally, in periods of crisis, there are expressions of unseemly violence. In an open-end discussion spanning so many centuries we cannot hold Judaism or its leaders responsible for individual errors. For instance, the Talmud declares over and over its respect for other religious convictions: "It is worse to injure a non-Jew than a Jewish brother." The Jew is called upon to love his fellow man, laconically, as in the following excerpt: "Who is the strong man? He who changes his enemy into a friend," or in the more rounded sentences: "What is the Torah's message to Israel? Take the yoke of the kingdom of heaven upon you, outdo one another in the fear of God and practice acts of love toward one another."

This sentiment is to be found throughout the Talmud. Rabbi Akiba terms it "a fundamental principle of the Torah," while Hillel, as we have seen, called it "the whole of the Law." Unfortunately, under the reign of the Emperor Hadrian, one of the worst periods of Jewish persecution, a Talmudic commentator, Rabbi Simeon ben Johai, aghast at "the horrible sight of Roman cruelty and destruction," uttered a war cry, intended to rouse his countrymen to rebellion. "Even the best of pagans is to be killed," he said, not meaning to set up a rule applying to all non-Jews, but simply to the soldiers who had perpetrated the massacre. This isolated sentence of the Tal-

mud, quite contrary to its general spirit, has too often served as a basis for attack against it.

At the time when Jesus went up, as a young boy, to the Temple of Jerusalem, the Talmud had not yet been codified; it was an oral tradition passed down among the doctors, which served as a framework for their diverse opinions, for the fine points of their commentary of the word of God. For this reason we cannot reconstruct the discussions in which Jesus took part. But we can be sure that such exchanges of views became familiar to him during the hidden years, since, as we shall see later on, many of his Gospel utterances reflect Talmudic inspiration and even Talmudic phraseology.

Jesus had not read either the Mishnah or the Gemara, which date from between the second and fourth centuries after his birth. But the fact that in them there are analogies with the text of the first-century Gospels makes for a relationship between the Talmud and the New Testament. They share a common source, a common atmosphere. However the process of osmosis may have occurred, it is certain that the Talmud was a part of Jesus' spiritual heritage. In guessing at the employment of Jesus' early years we must scrutinize both the Synagogue and the Talmud, the two custodians of the genius of Israel and the fountainheads of its legacy to Christianity.

Nothing is more difficult than to introduce the Talmud to anyone who is not familiar with it. Just as the essence of a human being cannot be reduced to a single

one of his outward appearances or chance characteristics, but resides in his innermost soul, so the life of the Talmud, a whole mental world joined to the two mysteries of God and His creature, cannot be conveyed by any simple definition or description.

We must look at it, of course, from an historical point of view. But what good is history without an analysis of the contents such as to enable us to distinguish among the various factors in its formation? Again, analysis serves no purpose unless we explain the method or methods of reasoning peculiar to the Talmud. An acquaintance with this dialectic process is necessary if we are to understand the Talmudists' mentality. Once more we come back to the necessity of quoting the texts, in all their variety of tones, dialectic, polemical, poetical, sentimental. Must we, then, have recourse to a presentation of "selected passages"? We cannot do without them, but no work lends itself less to anthologizing, or is more easily misrepresented by the quotation of mere excerpts; none demands such an acquaintance with the process of its formation and the life it mirrors. To know the Talmud one must live it; it must be the object of total consecration. The doctors whom Jesus met in the Temple had dedicated all their thoughts and feelings to the rabbinical tradition which they were about to reveal to him. At this moment he must have begun to glimpse one of the important choices which was to confront him when he attained religious maturity. Would he let himself be drawn into this compact, dense, yet ever-moving world of the doctors? Or would he, on the contrary, remain outside it and refuse to be a complete Talmudist, taking

only from their commentary that which was consonant with his genius and his vocation?

Let us begin by defining the Talmud in objective, contemporary fashion. First of all, let us consider its vocabulary. The Talmud, as we have said above, is a commentary devised by the intelligence of man upon writings inspired by God. Every word and letter of the text under study is the product of a divine intention, which human intelligence is challenged to discover. This pious search has nothing childish about it. The word of God is compared to a hammer, which "breaks stones, causing numberless sparks to fly." It shines forth in a multiplicity of interpretations, which demand a bold, adult effort to pin down the truth. Hence, under the guise of faithfulness to the letter, there is an audacious quest for the spirit. Only faithfulness to the letter can prepare the intelligence to go beyond it; the liberty of the Talmudist does not cast aside the tradition which he is pledged to continue. Recourse to word and verse serves to create a code language and at the same time to allow the free play of the mind, liberated from the indispensable signs which aroused it.

Here is a striking example. The midrash concerned with the text of the ten commandments notes that the first of them begins with aleph, the first letter of the alphabet, in the word *Anoki*, an emphatic form of the pronoun "I"—"I am the Lord thy God . . ." Strange to say, the first verse of Genesis begins with the second letter of the alphabet, beth, in the word *Bereshit*—"In the beginning . . ." To anyone that believes not only in

the function of letters but in their personality as well there is something puzzling about this reversal. Of the two essential texts of the Torah, why should the first begin with the second letter of the alphabet and the second with the first? It is, the Talmudist tells us, the result of a quarrel. For twenty-six generations, that is for the time between Genesis and Moses' ascent of Mount Sinai, aleph protested to God: "Why was not I, the first letter, chosen to head the description of the creation of the world? The beth of *bereshit* has usurped my place!" To which God replied that the creation of the world was not the first divine action. Long before the creation there was moral law, even if it had not yet been revealed. In the beginning was the Law, and the world came later. Consequently, in spite of the apparent error of which aleph complained, it was really in its proper place, at the beginning of the commandments, which God had carried in his head before the beginning of time.

Like other Talmud and Midrash stories, this one is not to be taken too literally. The rabbi who thought up such a fundamentally religious allegory knew perfectly well that things did not actually happen this way. But if the story has no basis in fact, it has, none the less, a deep inner meaning. It is important, also, as an illustration of the system on which the Talmud is constructed. Revelation and tradition are not obliterated by the study which grows out of and enlarges upon them. The Biblical text is a sacred universe, where nothing is profane or stagnant, where everything is fruitful in spiritual development.

With this living alphabet which transfigures and en-

nobles each one of its affirmations in almost hallucinating fashion, the Talmud proceeded to build up its various parts, which noninitiates may, for lack of knowledge, confuse one with another. There are two main divisions, of quite different meaning and value, the Halakah and the Haggadah. The commentaries of the Halakah have the binding force of law; those of the Haggadah are purely personal opinions, for which, as we should say in modern terms, "the authors alone are responsible." As Edmond Fleg explains it:

In the immense labyrinth of the two Talmuds two main currents of thought are recognizable. The commentaries of the Law belong to the realm of jurisprudence and constitute the Halakah, which has legal validity, that is, on condition that, according to a traditional interpretation of Exodus, 3:2, they represent a majority opinion of the doctors who have discussed them. The commentaries of the rest of the Bible are in the field of the imagination, as it is applied to a more or less legendary past, to an imperfect knowledge of the universe, to the need of stirring an assembly of the faithful, of discovering the mysteries of creation or anticipating visions from beyond the grave and promises of the last days of the world. All together these make up the Haggadah, a collection of stories, fables, dreams, images and symbols, which no Jew is bound to regard as rigorous truth.

Between the Halakah and the Haggadah there are one point of difference and two of likeness. The point of difference lies in the fact that all of Israel subscribes to and is responsible for the Halakah, whereas the Hag-

gadah may or may not be accepted, and its meaning is open to discussion. Many erroneous opinions and calumnies on the subject of the Talmud are due to ignorance of the exact nature of its composition.

Aside from this essential difference, there are two points which both parts have in common. First, their extraordinary abundance. The *halakot*, or legal precepts, are so numerous that when Maimonides codified them in the twelfth century they filled no less than fourteen volumes. As for the *haggadot* or, as they are more commonly called, *midrashim*, they make up the contents of a large number of tractates and contribute to Biblical literature the world over. The second likeness is that both *halakot* and *haggadot*, precepts and commentaries, come from an interpretation of the Torah made by means of the Torah itself. Their argumentation, which we shall examine later on, feeds on the Law and the Prophets; the exegesis of every verse is made on the basis of other verses. Thus a *halakah* or a *midrash* inspired by Genesis may rise out of the comparison of a verse from the beginning of this first book of the Pentateuch with one from Job or Ecclesiastes or from one of the prophets with which it has an affinity of thought or expression.

The Talmudist thinks only of God, but his familiarity with God's scriptural portrayal is enhanced by flights of the imagination which lead to the discovery of new perspectives on spiritual values. The method or methods employed vary with the century and according to whether it is a question of Halakah or Haggadah. Here we perceive the complexity of the Jewish mind and of the rabbinic tradition which stems from it. It is at the

same time sentimental and logical, capable of great impulses of the heart or the imagination and yet attached to the exact and sometimes pedantic rules of an implacable dialectic. For hundreds and hundreds of years an alienated and often persecuted Israel lived in close intimacy with God. Its mental make-up, as seen from the outside, may seem narrow. But if we enter deeply into the Jewish conscience we shall see that its limitations exist only in the eyes of a shallow observer. Actually it opens up to the inside; it is like a convent whose walls seem to shut it in, while all the time it is humming with prayers to God and thoughts of Him, rising ceaselessly toward the sky.

The double merit of the Talmud, sublime in its aim and worldly in its means, soaring in aspiration and yet bound to the rules of human dialectic, closed on the outside and open on the inside, is particularly evident in one of the doctors of Jesus' time. We have already noted his indulgence and now we must look at his severity. Hillel was not only the rabbi who would have been most congenial to Jesus on account of his broad-mindedness; he was also a man who drew up, as a vehicle for his generous ideas, the most rigorously logical system of exegesis the Talmudists had ever known. Thus he was at the same time a promoter of both free inspiration and disciplined argumentation.

Hillel the Wise is considered the codifier of the Talmudic method. He established or at least formulated rules for the interpretation of the written Law and for the spread of its action. There are seven rules, each one of them equivalent to a definite operation:

A fortiori

Analogy

Deduction from one (Biblical) verse

Deduction from two verses

Inference from general and particular; from particular and general

Similarity elsewhere

Deduction from context

These rules, taught in the Bet-Hillel, or House of Hillel, which Jesus must have heard mentioned by the doctors in the Temple, were intended to extract from a single verse of the Bible the lesson which God had put in it, to concretize, by the dialectic method, the manifestations of the divine in man's everyday living. The process may seem formalistic, but actually it goes beyond formalism and acquires a spiritual value. It is concerned with man's attitude toward the divine and defines the application of the divine, as willed by God, to the universe.

Here, for instance, is an example of the application of the first rule listed above.

The Sabbath, that weekly human reenactment of God's rest after the creation, is the focal point of the Jew's religion, the time when he feels closest to God. In spite of its repetition it is more important than the most festive of the once-a-year holy days, even Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur and Passover. And so, Hillel says, if a certain kind of work is authorized for the Sabbath day, we may presume that it is authorized, *a fortiori*, for the other, less holy days as well. And, conversely, if a certain

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kind of work is forbidden on one of the occasional holy days, it is all the more strictly forbidden on the Sabbath.

If we reflect that one of the essential purposes of the Halakah, the juridical part of the Talmud, is to establish the Jew's priestly duties on the days consecrated to God and if we remember these days' importance for a people which lives for God and cannot hope to endure except through loyalty to its ancient Covenant, then we shall see how deep a feeling lies behind these minutely detailed regulations. In the divine service formality takes on a committed, existential meaning. Applied to the living God it becomes concrete and intensely experienced.

This is the paradox of the Talmud, particularly of the Halakah, which lends moral value and transcendent meaning to a human logic in itself purely mechanical and therefore capable of leading to either truth or error. At worst it may bog down in arbitrary conventions, which undermine the foundations of human life and suppress all real contacts between man and the universe, between God and His creature. At best, if it respects these contacts, it can verify and concretize them.

"It is a mistake," says the Talmud, "in the process of reasoning, to come to conclusions, no matter how skillfully deduced, which are contradictory to reality. And it is an even more serious mistake to come to conclusions which contradict the Law, while calling upon its name. No deduction must be made from the Law which alters the Law."

It was dangerous to be a Talmudist, just as it is always dangerous to apply human reason to matters which surpass it. And particularly dangerous in Jesus' time, when

the profane reasoning of the pagan Greeks and Latins was an influence so deeply upsetting. And so in its juridical part, the dictatorial Talmud is full of reserves and scruples. Its apparently solid structure is in reality frail and vulnerable. If its logical rules do not rest upon a feeling for the sacred then they become formal and inhuman.

This great pitfall of the *halakot* was not so evident before Israel was subjected to the pressure of the pagan world. But at Jesus' time, when the Romans occupied Jerusalem, stood guard over its Temple and influenced the choice of its clergy, the legalistic features of the Talmud, cut off from their spiritual sources, may well have had something repellent about them.

The Haggadah, composed of *midrashim*, on the other hand, suffered from no such liability. Like its severe counterpart, the Haggadah is an elaboration of God's word by the word itself. But it proceeds by analogies rather than by logic, in a poetical rather than a dialectical manner. We might describe it in the words of Baudelaire's sonnet about man and nature:

He wanders there through woods of symbols, and  
They gaze at him with looks he seems to know.

For the composer of *midrashim* the Torah is a wood dense with symbols, or rather, allegories. The *midrash* is a specifically Jewish creation, in which an event's moral or spiritual significance is as important as its material reality. The whole Bible is, in a way, a *midrash*, for the events which it relates express moral and spiritual values

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and bear witness to the Law of God. The Gospels themselves, conceived in a Jewish atmosphere, contain *midrashim* in which the early Christians, so close to Judaism, saw a new incarnation of the Law. The parables and miracles of Jesus belong to the Haggadah, just as much as the Old Testament stories illustrative of the divine will.

Let us recapitulate the difference between the Haggadah and the Halakah. "The Halakah," says a Jewish sage quoted by A. Cohen in his book on the Talmud, "is the incarnation of the Law; the Haggadah is liberty disciplined by the Law and bearing an imprint of morality . . . The Halakah may be compared to the ramparts of the sanctuary, for which every Jew is ready to die; the Haggadah to the irregularly shaped, fragrant and colorful flower beds which display their exotic charm at the foot of the Temple walls."

Whatever terms of comparison we may use, nothing can take the place of concrete examples. Let us see, then, in what guise the Talmud, both Halakah and Haggadah, presented itself to Jesus.

The young boy, fresh from the provinces, had doubtless never known doctors whose life was consecrated to the study of the Law; he had never penetrated the Talmud, this monument to the rabbinic tradition which was, at the time, Israel's great unwritten religious and literary compendium. How did he react to it? Without attempting a foolhardy reconstruction, we can imagine some of the events of his sojourn in the Temple.

Probably the doctors received him in one of the rooms adjacent to the synagogue, which was secluded and quiet, in contrast to the holiday clamor of the courts

outside. This was not a room set aside for study, but on tables or shelves along the walls, or perhaps even in a tabernacle, there were stacked scrolls bearing the sacred texts from Genesis to the Prophets. At intervals the doctors went to look up a particular verse to support the point of view they were setting forth to the boys and young men before them. They were so familiar with the material that they found at once what they were looking for. Latter-day Talmudists have been known to press the point of a pencil against a verse of the Torah and to predict accurately on which word of a verse on the following page it will leave its mark.

But in spite of their learning the doctors were not mere pedants. Representatives of the holiday crowd outside came in at intervals to interrupt them. A beggar implored alms, a man of conscience came to resolve some moral problem that was on his mind; the head of a family questioned them about the details of his household Passover celebration: the proper hour at which to hold the Seder, the foods to be served, the order of the traditional questions and answers. All these matters were settled by consultation of the sacred scrolls around the walls, for both public and private life were regulated by the Law. As Jesus approached these learned men he may well have felt a deepening and strengthening of the ties which bound him to the tradition of his fathers.

The doctors, with prayer shawls over their shoulders and prayer vests (*tallith katan*) worn next to the skin, welcomed this opportunity of instructing the young. They were not members of the professional clergy; indeed they had gainful occupations on the outside, for it

was forbidden to make money from teaching the Torah. In the exercise of a spare-time priestly function they found a welcome release from wordly cares and also a source of spiritual satisfaction. They were happy to renew their intimacy with God, to deepen their understanding of His word and to carry out the prescriptions of the Shema by teaching the commandments to their juniors.

To the young Nazarene their argumentation may at first have appeared unduly difficult, requiring a mental effort such as to bring on tension and fatigue. But their contagious enthusiasm, the joy they derived from the closely reasoned justification of a subtle Halakah, the peaceful assurance which rang out in their sing-song declarations, all these facilitated Jesus' approach to the world of their intellectual tradition.

Changing their pace, the doctors allowed their young hearers to relax momentarily the strained attentiveness required by the Halakah, and listen to the Haggadah. Jesus could not have failed to notice the lesser emphasis they placed upon it. The Halakah, which teaches the practical applications of the Torah or, in brief, of God's word, must be strictly taught, so that there is no misunderstanding of the text.

Let us suppose, since the young Jesus had come straight from a village synagogue and knew nothing of the practices of the Temple, that the doctors chose to initiate him to the Temple's peculiar rite, sacrifice. How many halakot they would have had to expound! There was no question of going into all the ritual prescriptions; it was quite hard enough to describe its origin and mean-

ing. For sacrifice, the all-important religious act which was the monopoly of the Temple, had as many forms as there were ceremonies and almost as many as the days of the year. Although all the sacrifices had points in common, they had also individual characteristics which the famous rules of Hillel allow us to compare one with another.

In the sacrifice of Yom Kippur the essential was the purity of everything concerned, from the priest to the sacrificial object. The Gemara tells us what were the priest's preliminary obligations:

*Seven days before . . . the priest was removed from his house to the cell in the northeastern corner of the birah. It was called the cell of the stone chamber (Bet ha-even) . . . Because all its functions had to be performed only in vessels made of either . . . stone or earthenware.*

Why the choice of stone? Because the objects used must be incapable of becoming impure. Something made of clay or a mineral directly out of the earth was guaranteed against impurity by the fact that it came straight from God's hand. Conversely, any raw material manufactured by man was subject to impurity. But there was no use in assuring the purity of the accessories if the man who manipulated them was not equally pure. The Gemara proceeds more cautiously to discuss what was necessary for the high priest's purification. Was his seven-day quarantine to be shared by his wife and children? Exactly how was the lustral water to be mixed with the

ashes of a red heifer? And what was the comparative significance of the sacrifices, that of two goats and that of a goat and a bullock? Like lawyers cavilling in their clients' behalf, the doctors debated every detail of the ritual regulations. But here it was a question not of law but of the Law. At stake was not the fate of an individual but that of all mankind, to be settled upon the coming of the Messiah. And the nature of his judgment would be determined by the sum total of human actions here below.

We have compared the Talmudists to lawyers. But their strivings were ennobled by a religious motive. Every step of their reasoning went back to the Scriptures: a sentence from Genesis, from one of the Prophets, from the books of Jonah or Esther, all these worked together to hasten God's coming. Such meticulous research was bound to produce a certain number of pedants, but when it was accompanied by an impulse of the heart, when strict religious observance brought with it the spirituality which the Talmud says that every Sabbath offers to longing man anew, then the weight of excessive ratiocination is replaced by an extraordinary feeling of liberty and joy.

To arrive at this point requires a laborious effort. Jesus must have had to strain his youthful mind to encompass the complex and minute reasoning of the doctors. It was at this juncture that their grasp of educational psychology caused them to pass from the Halakah to the Haggadah. The Haggadah or the midrash, says one of the Talmudists, is like a dessert served at the end of a heavy meal.

Like the Halakah it presupposes constant recourse to the Scriptures, so that the doctors had to consult in the same way as before the sacred scrolls stacked up around the walls. But in the rabbinic tradition the Haggadah, without any loss of importance, is almost recreational in character. When a rabbi teaches the Haggadah he is like a schoolmaster giving his students a break by telling them stories. What a variety of riches they offer, and what a welcome interruption, to the young Jesus, of the closely-knit logic of the Halakah! There are examples of outright joking on the part of sages with a definite sense of humor and often a touch of misogyny.

Why, for instance, asks one of the Talmudists, did God make woman from Adam's rib? Here is his version of the story:

God deliberated from which part of man to make woman. He said, "I must not create her from the head that she should not carry herself haughtily; nor from the eye, that she should not be inquisitive; nor from the ear, that she should not be an eavesdropper; nor from the mouth, that she should not be too talkative; nor from the hand, that she should not be too acquisitive; nor from the foot, that she should not be a gadabout; but from a hidden part of the body, that she should be modest."

Such a theory was bound to engender further discussion. Some doctors espoused the cause of Eve. They praised woman's love of work: "Women do not hang lazily about the house"; and their intelligence: "God made woman more intelligent than man." But others

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were frankly mocking. They accused women of being talkative: "Ten measures of words were sent down into the world, of which woman took nine and man one"; and of various faults besides: "Women are reported to have four salient characteristics: they are greedy, they listen at doors, they are lazy and jealous. Morevoer, they are loquacious and quarrelsome."

Is this mere oversimplified common sense? Not so. These mocking comments arouse philosophical reflections. Usually the Haggadah is less personal in tone and less ironic; its teachings are definitely religious and moralistic in character. Jewish morality is based on love and mercy, and the Haggadah shows God practicing these two virtues and giving them as examples to man. In the rabbinical tradition there is a perpetual quarrel between the two divine attributes of mercy and justice, both of which are obviously indispensable to the progress of the universe.

Here is an allegorical story, told in a midrash:

A king who had some empty glasses said to himself: "If I pour hot water into them they will crack; if I pour ice-cold water into them they will also crack!" What did the king do? He mixed the hot and the cold water together and poured it into them and they did not crack. Even so did the Holy One, blessed be he, say: "If I create the world on the basis of mercy alone, the world's sins will greatly multiply. If I create it on the attribute of justice alone, how could the world endure? I will therefore create it with both the attributes of mercy and justice, and may it endure!"

But although God may consider both these elements indispensable, this does not mean that he employs them with equal pleasure. He is much happier to deal out mercy than justice.

When the Holy One (*blessed be his name!*) was about to create the first man, he foresaw that both good and evil would come out of him. "If I go ahead and create him," he said to himself, "there will be wicked men among his descendants. But if I fail to create him, then there will be no good men to owe him their existence." And so, what did he do? He removed his thoughts from the wicked, took upon himself the attribute of mercy and created man.

"The attribute of grace," the Haggadah says elsewhere, "is five hundred times greater than that of justice." A very precise statement, which concludes a piece of subtle Talmudic reasoning. God has declared that he will "visit the iniquities of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation" (Exodus, 20:5), but in the next verse he says that he will "shew mercy unto thousands (of generations)." Now the Hebrew plural, *alaphim*, must designate at least two thousand. We see, then—Q.E.D.—that if God's wrath is visited upon at the most four generations and his grace upon at least two thousand, it follows that his mercy is five hundred times as great as his justice. It is with just such a mixture of allegorical tales and meticulous reasoning, spiced with humor, that the Haggadah conveys a moral. Moreover, it contains its share of strictly religious teach-

ing. Numerous midrashim bear witness to the presence and power of God. Here is a typical anecdote:

A ship owned by a pagan was on the high seas, and aboard it was a Jewish boy. A fierce storm arose, and the pagans called upon their idols, but in vain. Admitting the failure of their prayers they turned to the young Jew. "Pray to your God," they said, "we have heard that he is all-powerful and that he answers the supplications which are addressed to him." The boy responded by offering up an earnest prayer. God listened to him, and the sea was calmed. When the ship put into port the passengers went ashore to buy what they needed. "Is there nothing you want to buy?" they asked the boy. "What should a poor stranger like myself buy?" he replied. "A poor stranger?" they exclaimed. "We are the poor strangers! Some of us have gods in Babylon, some in Rome; others carry their gods with them but have received no help. But you, wherever you go, enjoy your God's protection."

The Eternal is not only ever-present; He is omniscient as well. "Reflect upon three things," says Rabbi Judah the Prince, compiler of the Mishnah, "and thou wilt not fall into sin. Know what is above thee, a seeing eye, a hearing ear, and all thy deeds recorded in a book."

God is omnipotent also. A well-known rabbinical sentence says: "Everything is subject to the power of Heaven except the fear of Heaven," which means that although God determines man's fate He leaves him free to fear God or not to fear Him.

Such haggadot, of varied nature and tone, bring God

closer to earth and allow man to achieve intimacy with Him. In the same familiar way they treat the great Biblical figures, the men who submit to His justice or are messengers of His will. They are humanized, but it is for the sake of pointing up their relationship with God. Let us look at the following *midrash* account of the last moments of Adam and Eve:

When Adam was nine hundred and thirty years old, and ailing, he sent Eve and Seth to the vicinity of the Garden of Eden, to ask God to accord a dying man some of the oil of life (or of mercy) which runs from the tree of the Garden. The precious oil was refused but Michael told them, in God's name, that after their resurrection Adam and the rest of the holy people would enter Paradise. Adam died, and God forgave him. The angels came for his body and buried it in Eden.

Six days later Eve died, in her turn, having asked Seth to inscribe the story of his parents' life on tablets of stone and on tablets of clay. "Because," she said, "the Archangel Michael told us: 'On account of your transgressions the Lord will visit his wrath on your descendants, first by water and then by fire.' Thus the stone tablets will survive the flood and the clay tablets the world's final burning."

This story illustrates in lively fashion Adam and Eve's desire for survival and God's ultimate pardon of their sin. But, we may ask, does it have any other than an allegorical intention? Does it claim that Adam and Eve

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really acted this way, or are the facts subordinate to some deeper meaning?

Another even more typical *midrash* may answer our question. The subject is the Children of Israel's crossing of the Red Sea, the withdrawal of its waters which enabled them to walk through it on dry land. Is or is not this story historically true? For two thousand years not only theologians but historians and scientists as well have tried to find out whether the tidal movements of the Red Sea were such as to cause it to seem to retire when the Children of Israel reached it in their flight.

To the Talmud this is no problem; the materiality of the miracle does not matter. The important thing—and this emphasis is typically Talmudic—is the meaning which God wishes us to attach to the story. According to the Talmud, the passage of the Red Sea is the antithesis of the Flood. In the Flood, God manifested his anger at the sinful human race by covering the earth with water. The parting of the Red Sea and the emergence of dry land demonstrated a change of heart. God no longer sought to punish or destroy mankind but to assure its survival. It bore witness to a new pledge on God's part to the Children of Israel.

This interpretation on the part of the writers of the Haggadah gives the episode an importance far greater than its historical reality. It matters very little whether or not actual events followed the lines of the Bible story. The essential thing is that first God and then the men whom He inspired endowed it with a moral and religious significance which strengthened Israel's priestly vocation.

Such an interpretation accords with the spirit of the Talmud, that is with the spirit of Judaism in Jesus' time. The atmosphere in which the Haggadah developed was that of a sacred world, in which words and gestures took part in God's will. Every element of this world lent its support to the divinity. Every historical event, real or allegorical, was a manifestation of Divine Providence. Its terrestrial coordinates, in space and time, might be approximate or debatable, but it was connected to Divine Providence by a direct spiritual line; its spiritual truth was more important than its material verisimilitude.

In this atmosphere, favorable to prophets, initiates, and belief in miracles, the twelve-year-old Jesus spent three days as a disciple and partner of the doctors. This sojourn in the Temple must have deepened his understanding of the religious tradition into which God had caused him to be born. An understanding not so much of historical details or of the letter of the law, as of the spirit of Judaism, half allegorical, half realistic, as the midrash presents it. For although we may doubt that he was attracted by the legalistic Halakah, it seems probable, from the evidence of the Gospels, that the Haggadah was a source of inspiration for his later preaching.

# 8.

## The Young Jesus and the Romans

AMONG the conventional berakhot, or benedictions, which Jesus heard and doubtless himself pronounced in the Temple, there was one which was more appropriate to Jerusalem than to Nazareth. This is the second of the benedictions at dawn. The first one is to praise God "who hast given the cock intelligence to distinguish between night and day." "We must say this berakha," the Talmud tells us, "even if we have not heard the cock crow, for it expresses gratitude for our enjoyment of the light of day."

Next come three blessings relative to human life, a burden heavy and yet glorious to carry. It is difficult to be a man, difficult to be a Jew, and was particularly so at this time when Israel had the only monotheistic religion and its people, although endowed with the privilege of priesthood, were subject to persecution. The first of these three berakhot, the second to be pronounced at dawn,

thanks God for having entrusted the Jew with the sublime and dangerous duty of representing Him on earth. There is an optional variation of emphasis, as expressed in the two different forms: "Blessed be thou, Lord our God, Ruler of the Universe, who hast made me an Israelite," or: "Blessed be thou, Lord our God, Ruler of the Universe, because thou hast not made me a heathen."

These two versions complement each other, and are not to be regarded as expressions of national or racial pride. If Israel is "the people [that] dwell alone and shall not be numbered among the nations," it is for the purpose of conserving the revelation particularly entrusted to it for the benefit of all mankind. This fundamental blessing is not political but religious, and it was thus that Jesus had understood it when he lived in the village of Nazareth, where there was little awareness of the Roman occupation. But when he heard it pronounced in the Temple, in the shadow of Roman might, it took on a new meaning; it spoke of Israel's trials, of its subjection to an alien power and the many dangers overhanging its people.

For three centuries Greco-Latin civilization had been insinuating itself into Jewish life and culture. In the first place there was economic penetration, embodied in the imitative use of agricultural and building techniques. In our day this would be comparable to an under-developed country being influenced by Russian or American films. Beginning with the third century B.C. the products of Hellenic cities made their way into Palestine and influenced the life of the local population. In general this influence made for progress, even if the imports were

not of the highest quality. Marcel Brion tells us that they were often inferior goods, which Roman merchants were unable to palm off on their usual customers and shipped overseas. Nevertheless such articles, even if they were imperfect, impressed local artisans and made them improve their technique. Pottery was more skillfully baked and more delicately ornamented. "White garlands on a black background, red or black bands against white . . . were local imitations of a Hellenic model." Palestinian craftsmen began to sign their work, and usually the name was that of a Hellenized Jew.

After the material influence came that of the spirit. Not that the Jews were converted to the conquerors' religion; the Romans never tried to destroy the beliefs of the countries they conquered or to introduce their own in their place but used tactics, far more subtle and insidious, of assimilation. They treated the native gods as protectively as they did the native population. By contributing sacrifices to their altars they made them into "satellites."

When the young Jesus came to Jerusalem this process had been going on for two hundred years; the Jews had had ample time in which to find out the cost of resisting the conquerors and the advantage of going along with them. In 168 B.C. the revolt of the Maccabees delivered Palestine from Greek and Egyptian domination, but in the following century the new Jewish state, threatened by the Seleucids, sought the protection of Rome, which the Roman senate, for reasons of self-interest, was prompt to accord. "Lodged between the two great Macedonian monarchies, Syria and Egypt, the Jews were precious allies," writes Theodore Reinach. "They could be

used as intelligence agents, subversives or military auxiliaries. A formal treaty was drawn up between Rome and the Hasmoneans and several times renewed, along with supporting financial arrangements."

Soon Rome made itself into the protector of its Jewish subjects engaged in business in other countries as well. In 142 B.C. the Senate sent a circular letter to various kings and people of the Middle East, recommending to them the Jews who lived in their lands. The Jews, then, could depend upon the protection of the representatives of Rome just as, today, the citizens of a satellite country or a mandated territory can call upon the good offices of the power that has them under its wing.

Such were the advantages offered to those Jews that came to terms with the Republic. Even in this faraway century, paternalism was not unknown. On the other hand, with those that refused to play the game, Rome dealt harshly. The Talmud, whose purpose was to keep Jewish religious thought alive, is full of references to the clandestine resistance of the doctors, most of them Pharisees, less inclined than the Sadducees to accept foreign domination. Here is Abraham Heschel's rendition of a Talmudic story which reflects the atmosphere of the occupation in the period before Jesus' birth. There are striking parallels to the events of the Nazi conquest of our own days; all the same characters are present: the resister, the fence-straddler, the collaborator and the spy.

*Rabbi Judah ben Ilai, Rabbi Jose, and Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai were sitting together, and with them was a*

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man called Judah ben Gerim. Rabbi Judah opened the discussion and said:

"How fine are the works of this people [the Romans]! They have made roads and market places, they have built bridges, they have erected bathhouses."

Rabbi Jose was silent.

Then Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai replied and said:

"All that they made they made for themselves. They made roads and market places to put harlots there; they built bridges to levy tolls for them; they erected bathhouses to delight their bodies."

Judah ben Gerim went home and related to his father and mother all that had been said. And the report of it spread until it reached the government. Decreed the government:

"Judah who exalted us shall be exalted; Jose who was silent shall go into exile; Simeon who reviled our work shall be put to death."

When Rabbi Simeon heard of the decree, he took his son Rabbi Eleazar with him and hid in the House of Learning. And his wife came every day and brought him stealthily bread and a jug of water. When Rabbi Simeon heard that men were searching for them and trying to capture them, he said to his son:

"We cannot rely upon a woman's discretion, for she can easily be talked over. Or perhaps she may be tortured until she discloses our place of concealment."

So they went together into the field, and hid themselves in a cave, so that no man knew what had become of them. And a miracle happened: a carob tree grew up

inside the cave and a well of water opened, so that they had enough to eat and enough to drink. They took off their clothes and sat up to their necks in sand. The whole day they studied Torah. And when the time for prayer came, they put their clothes on and prayed, and then they put them off and again dug themselves into the sand, so that their clothes should not wear away. Thus they spent twelve years in the cave.

When the twelve years had come to an end, Elijah the prophet came and, standing at the entrance of the cave, exclaimed:

“Who will inform the son of Yohai that the emperor is dead and his decree has been annulled?”

When they heard this, they emerged from the cave. Seeing the people plowing the fields and sowing the seed, they exclaimed:

“These people forsake eternal life and are engaged in temporary life!”

Whatever they looked upon was immediately consumed by the fire of their own eyes. Thereupon a voice from heaven exclaimed:

“Have ye emerged to destroy My world? Return to your cave!”

So they returned and dwelled there another twelve months; for, they said, the punishment of the wicked in hell lasts only twelve months.

When the twelve months had come to an end, the voice was heard from heaven saying:

“Go forth from your cave!”

Thus they went out. Wherever Rabbi Eleazar hurt, Rabbi Simeon healed. Said Rabbi Simeon:

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"My son, if only we two remain to study the Torah, that will be sufficient for the world."

It was the eve of the Sabbath when they left the cave, and as they came out they saw an old man carrying two bundles of myrtle in his hand, a sweet-smelling herb having the perfume of paradise.

"What are these for?" they asked him.

"They are in honor of the Sabbath," the old man replied.

Said Rabbi Simeon to his son:

"Behold and see how dear God's commands are to Israel . . ."

At that moment they both found tranquillity of soul.

This extraordinary *mashal*, this significant and poetic parable, like many another Talmudic story, has two levels of meaning. It is not only an allegory; it is also a documentary account of a kind of underground resistance, very much like that of our own day. And there are other Talmudic texts which supplement this picture of the clandestine activities whose tradition Jesus must have known, at least by hearsay. His own time was not one of persecution. The Romans of his day bore down only upon those who openly defied them, and behaved in stolidly "correct" fashion toward the peaceful bulk of the population.

But the memory of the trials endured by previous generations and of the heroic deeds of the resistance movement were still very much alive. There was a genuine fear that the Roman rulers might return to their former brutality, and when the young Jesus came to the

official sanctuary of the Jewish religion he must have breathed an air redolent of the persecutions of the past and those of the future.

The Talmudic tradition was rich in allusions to the Roman conquerors, in subtly mocking stories which hinted at means of evading their will. The name of the Romans was not openly pronounced, but as during all other occupations there were many nicknames and roundabout phrases for designating the foe. The Talmud speaks most often of "Edom" instead of Rome. And when the doctors winkingly referred to the "reed animals," they meant, of course, the Romans. Who but a Talmudist could have understood the etymological basis of this mockery? Some of them held that "reed animal" meant one whose good deeds could all be written down with a single reed, or pen, because the Romans' only original contribution to humanity was the respect they bore their parents. Others said that, among civilized people, only the Romans had recourse, in recording their deeds, to a foreign pen, since unlike both Greeks and Jews they had no writing of their own but had to borrow from abroad.

A sensitive boy, and one with a religious bent, could not fail to be thrilled by learning the ruses to which the Jewish faith owed its survival. A clandestine religion has its tricks, just like any other clandestine organization, and the Jews transmitted political news and instructions by cryptic messages not very different from those sent out by the B.B.C. to Resistance groups in Nazi-occupied countries during the last war. In the second century A.D., when the Romans, in the attempt to impose

their calendar upon the Jews, forbade them to go by the dates of their own, Rabbi Judah the Prince, compiler of the Mishnah, sent an emissary, Hiyya, to En-Tob to convey the news in the enigmatic sentence: "May David, King of Israel, live forever!" This happened after Jesus' time, but the method was obviously one of long standing in the history of the persecution endured by the Jews. Similar conventional phrases were used to rally the people to a religious celebration. "Windmills are whirring at Burni" was an invitation to a circumcision; "Light is shining at Berul-Hayil" to a wedding banquet.

At other times the rabbis, like the inhabitants of any occupied country, turned the conquerors' prescriptions to their own advantage. When the Romans forbade the doctors to carry out the ceremony of investiture, threatening death to the participants and destruction to the locality where it took place, Judah ben Baba proceeded to consecrate five new doctors on a mountainous spot midway between Usha and Shefaram, so that both towns should be saved from retaliation, and only he and his followers have to pay.

Even the observance of religious holidays was altered in order to deceive the persecutors. In some years the celebration of Yom Kippur was not held on the date prescribed by the Torah but postponed until the following Sabbath. From a spiritual point of view this was not a grave lapse, since penitence is timely at any season. The same thing occurred on the day of Hanukkah, the commemoration of the victory of the Maccabees, which could not but be displeasing to the Romans. Custom demanded that for eight days every Jew hang lamps

on the outside of his front door. But in order to elude the vigilance of the Roman police, the Jews were authorized to keep the lamps burning on a table inside the house.

The *mezuzah*, the parchment declaring the unity of God which, according to the Torah, was to be affixed to the doorpost of every house and signify its religious allegiance, was camouflaged lest it facilitate the early-morning police raids so familiar to every occupied country. Instead of being displayed on the outside it was hung inside, or even hidden in a hollow tube. The Mishnah and the Talmud bear witness to the fact that a number of *halakhot*, or legal prescriptions, were modified in the same way, in order to stave off persecution.

This tradition of pursuit and evasion, which preceded Jesus and continued after him, was doubtless passed down in the stories told by his elders. Just so, today, those who played a part in the Underground during the war tell their exploits to their children. Jesus did not know of such things by hearsay alone. During his youth more than one dramatic incident caused an upheaval among his countrymen and subjected him to a traumatic experience such as, in the course of history, many a young Jew has known. For instance, in the year A.D. 6, after a census imposed by the Romans, a certain Judah of Gamala and a Pharisee called Zadok incited a peasant revolt, which the Romans had to put down by force of arms.

The atmosphere of the Temple, at the time when Jesus spent his three days there, was peaceful in appearance only. There was order, to be sure, like the order of

conquered Warsaw, nineteen hundred odd years later, but it was order imposed by idolatrous conquerors. The Roman influence was political and spiritual at the same time. Politically, the situation of Palestine was not unlike that of Vichy France. The high priest was, to all intents and purposes, a creature of the Romans; their governors superintended, revised or annulled his most important decisions. He could not even put on his vestments without their authorization, since they were kept in the Tower of Antonia and brought out only on festive occasions. This humiliating procedure was enforced during the whole of Jesus' life; it was only in A.D. 36, after the removal of Pontius Pilate, that it was abrogated. On the occasion of the Passover celebration which was taking place when Jesus spent the three days in the Temple, this fact must have been very much under discussion. When the Pharisee doctors saw the regalia of the high priest they doubtless commented upon the fact that it was enjoying only provisory liberty.

The Sanhedrin, which exercised both political and religious power, was made up of conformists. There was a majority of aristocrats among its members, and they were naturally prone to support the established order. This explains the role of the Sanhedrin and of Caiphas in the trial of Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

The general situation was one difficult for the Jews to endure. As the German Jewish historian, Graetz, tells us: "The sufferings caused by the pitiless tyranny of

<sup>1</sup> Matthew, 27:20. The chief priests and elders urged the crowd to demand the life of Jesus. Again, in John, 19:6, the chief priests and Roman officers clamored for his crucifixion. In neither account is the mass of the Jewish people involved.

the Roman rulers, the heedlessness of the Herodian princes, the cowardice of the Jewish aristocracy, the sycophancy of the high priests and the discord among the various parties" were disturbing to all consciences. Among the upper class there were many who let themselves be bought over; the poor, on the other hand, lulled their despair with the hope of a Messiah. There was also a group which tried to achieve a synthesis between the Torah and Hellenic culture. This group was particularly susceptible to Roman influence.

The attitude of the doctors seems to have been ambivalent. Upon certain occasions they condemned Greco-Roman culture completely and demanded that the faithful steer clear of it. One of the rabbis of the Talmud exclaims vehemently: "Cursed be the man who brings up his children like swine, and cursed be he who teaches his son the lore of the Greeks." Moreover, devout Jews took precautions, some of them extraordinarily drastic, to protect their sacred heritage from pagan profanation. Certain writers believe that the prohibition of pronouncement of the Tetragrammaton, the mystical word which evoked the name of the Divinity, was due to considerations of this kind. Idolaters had made gross fun of it; a witty Egyptian, for instance, compared Yahweh to the Copt word *iw* or *aw*, meaning "donkey." This juxtaposition of the holy name with that of an unclean animal was intolerable. At first the Jews restricted its use to ceremonies taking place in the Temple, then they sought to make it inaudible to the faithful by covering it with the priests' chants. Finally Simon the Just, a contemporary of Alexander the Great, forbade it completely.

Substitutes—Ha-Shem (the Name) and Adonai (the Lord)—were pressed into use. By reason of its absence the Tetragrammaton began to acquire mystical power. The Old Testament book of Enoch tells of the belief that the world was created by virtue of this hidden name, which even the angels did not learn until they had passed through a long novitiate. Thus a whole symbolism was born of the crude pun of an Egyptian idolater.

But although the Jewish sages wished to preserve the Torah from foreign contamination they favored making it known abroad, so that pagans might become acquainted with monotheism. This fact is witnessed by the Greek translation made for the benefit of the Jews of Alexandria.

Alexandria was the city with the largest number of Jews in Egypt, with Heliopolis coming after. In 312 b.c. Ptolemy I captured Jerusalem and took back to his own country, especially to Alexandria, a whole Jewish colony. "Having found them to be loyal and courageous allies he allowed the Jews to settle in a section of the new city and to enjoy the same rights as the Greeks." As further immigration and growing prosperity caused their numbers to increase, Alexandria became a Jewish spiritual center, second only to Jerusalem, in the ancient world. Jews from Alexandria eventually settled in places as far away as Cyrene, in North Africa, and the vicinity of Ethiopia.

About a hundred and fifty years after the settlement was established in Alexandria, a second group of Jews settled in Heliopolis. Most of them came straight from Palestine, where there was at this time much persecu-

tion, and they were seeking religious freedom. With them they brought the Pharisaic tradition. Whereas the Jews of Alexandria had become Hellenized, the newcomers for a long time avoided contact with the Greeks and their culture. At Heliopolis there was a definite policy of maintaining the purity, or rather the isolation of Jewish religious thought.

Meanwhile the older and larger Jewish colony in Alexandria represented two-fifths of the city's population. Its continued presence and growth testified to the fact that it was at home in the midst of a Hellenic civilization. At the same time the Jews' loyalty to their own faith and practices inspired respect among their Greek fellow citizens. "The fame of our laws was widespread," wrote the Hellenized Jew, Philo. "Some people found it strange that the Greeks should not be acquainted with them at first hand and wished to translate them. The most celebrated of kings took it upon himself to see that this good work was done." Just as Greek culture won over the victorious Romans, inspiring the famous phrase of the historian Tacitus: *Graecia capta ferum victorem vincit*, so a Jewish minority influenced the conquering Greeks. The beliefs and customs of the Jews, their concepts of monotheism and moral law so impressed the Greco-Egyptians that their king wished them to possess the text of the Biblical revelation.

At the suggestion of the keeper of the royal library, which contained a collection, extraordinary for the age, of two hundred thousand volumes, Ptolemy II, known as Philadelphus, wrote to Eleazer, the high priest at Jerusalem, to ask him to authorize a translation of the

Law. He declared himself ready, in return, to free a hundred thousand Jews consigned by his father, Ptolemy I, to captivity, by this means, "demonstrating his pity and the gratitude he felt toward the supreme God to whom he owed the prosperity of his kingdom." Eleazar was to send seventy-two elders, six from each tribe of Israel, "selected for their wisdom and their perfect knowledge of both Hebrew and Greek," to do the translation.

When the seventy-two translators arrived at Alexandria the king offered them a banquet which lasted no less than seven days, on each one of which he questioned ten of their number and expressed his admiration for their learning, not only in the fields of morals and philosophy but in that of politics as well. After this they were sent to the island of Pharos, where they proceeded in peace and quiet to translate the holy books. In seventy-two days their work was done, and read aloud before the Jewish colony of Alexandria, which gave it full approval. Cursed was he who would alter this text.

But although the seventy-two sages meant their Greek version to have the same infallibility as the God-inspired Hebrew original, they were unintentionally guilty of making many alterations. Of course it was still the Bible, the Sepher Torah, or Pentateuch, and the Prophets. But although the facts were there, the spirit in which they were told was quite different. Consciously or unconsciously the Jews were affected by the Hellenized atmosphere of Egypt. Their alterations fell into two main categories.

First, under Greco-Roman religious influence, they

diluted the meaning of the Jewish faith. Second, under the influence of Greek philosophy, they bowdlerized both the Bible's narrative and its teaching.

The Jewish faith does not seek primarily to console man for the fatalities inherent in his human condition. It teaches him to accept and grapple with them. It is a clear-eyed view, often tragic in character, which does not seek to hide their harshness and apparent injustice but points out what effort can be made to overcome them.

It is perhaps in the Book of Job that we see most clearly the existential character of Judaism. As his three friends are trying to console the unjustly smitten Job, God makes his last personal appearance in the Bible and disdainfully refutes them. Man must not be consoled by high-sounding platitudes, he says; rather, he must be put in his place in creation and made to participate in the cosmic order, even if the place is unsure and uncomfortable and the order often seems oppressive. This close link between Divine Providence and earthly reality is what we mean by Jewish existentialism. But what happens to it in the Septuagint version?

In a recent Catholic book<sup>1</sup> there is a keen analysis of the alteration. To begin with, the Greek version of the Book of Job is one fifth shorter than the Hebrew original; the translators made, if not a "digest," certainly an abridgment. They suppressed everything which, in the light of their rhetorical training, seemed unnecessary to understanding of the text, all the parallel constructions, repetitions and the almost panting rhythm proper to

<sup>1</sup> Paul Auvray, Pierre Poulain, Albert Blaise: *Les langues mortes*, Paris, 1957.

Hebrew lyric poetry. Hebrew lyricism consists of a whole orchestration of echoes around a central idea, an idea which moves forward by dint of alternate contrasts and comparisons, in an atmosphere propitious to the enouncement of a central truth. The translators of the Septuagint were ruled by reason and logic rather than sensibility; they sought to obtain clarity rather than intensity of feeling, and so they did not hesitate to cut out what seemed to them useless excrescences. How shocking, for instance, that Job should speak to God in these terms:

*Is it good unto thee that thou shouldst oppress, that thou shouldst despise the work of thine hands, and shine upon the counsel of the wicked?*

*Hast thou eyes of flesh? or seest thou as man seeth?*

In the Septuagint version, these apostrophes are abbreviated and watered down; indeed, there is a complete reversal of meaning in the sentence: "Is it agreeable to thee that I should commit iniquity?" Likewise Job's angry protest: "He destroyeth the perfect and the wicked," is changed into the ineffective and erroneous statement: "[His] wrath destroyeth the great and the powerful."

As the writers of the book from which we have drawn some of the material above put it: "The dramatic debate between Job and God loses all its sharpness. Job is no longer the unjustly tortured innocent man who dares ask the Lord for an accounting; he is a model of patience and humility."

And there are many other examples. The 25th chapter of Isaiah begins thus:

*O Lord, thou art my God; I will exalt thee, I will praise thy name; for thou hast done wonderful things; thy counsels of old are faithfulness and truth.*

*For thou hast made of a city an heap; of a defenced city a ruin: a palace of strangers to be no city; it shall never be built.*

*Therefore shall the strong people glorify thee, the city of the terrible nations shall fear thee.*

*For thou hast been a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall.*

*Thou shalt bring down the noise of strangers, as the heat in a dry place; even the heat with the shadow of a cloud: The branch of the terrible ones shall be brought low.*

This passionate and colorful outburst is feebly rendered by the Septuagint as follows:

*O Lord God, thee I will glorify: in songs of praise I will extol thy name. For thou hast executed wonderful things . . .*

*Because thou hast reduced cities to a heap of ruins—cities made strong so that their foundations might not fall; therefore the distressed people will bless thee and the cities of injured men will give thee thanks; for thou hast been the support of every humble city and the de-*

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fence of them who were dispirited by reason of their weakness. From wicked men thou wilt deliver them. Thou art the support of the thirsty and the breath of men in distress.

When dispirited men shall be thirsting in Zion on account of wicked men to whom thou hast delivered us up; then will the Lord of Hosts make provision for all the nations.

A comparison of these two texts cannot but lead us to agree with the authors of the book quoted above, when they say that "a series of slight but definite modifications have altered the general tone." The Hellenized translators did not only shorten and water down the Hebrew text; they were unfaithful to its spirit as well. Treating Moses as if he were a Hebrew Plato, they adapted the naïve but meaningful Old Testament stories to the tenets of Greek idealism. Even at the very beginning of Genesis we can see the same thing. The Hebrew text shows God creating out of nothing the different elements of the universe. Vegetation and trees he created with particular and truly divine simplicity:

And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth, and it was so.

And the earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after his kind: and God saw that it was good.

But the Septuagint translators found this process too direct. God was no Aristotelian; He did not seem to know the difference between potential being and actual being. And so they proceeded to make up for His insufficiency by giving the text a philosophical slant.

*And God said: Let the earth produce the grassy plant with sowing seed, according to kind and according to likeness, and the fruit-bearing tree together with the fruit, the seed of which is in it, according to kind, in the earth.*

In other words, God made the images or prototypes of things before He made the things themselves, and His act of creation consisted of nothing more than a passage from virtual to actual existence.

The Holy Scriptures, falsified at first contact by the Greek spirit, continued to suffer from its inroads in the years that followed. At the time of Jesus, Philo, the Jewish philosopher of Alexandria, carried the idealization of God a step farther. "God seems to me," he said, "to have two temples: one of them is the universe, with God's first-born, the Word, as its high priest; the other is the rational soul, whose priest is the real man. The priest who offers up prayers and sacrifices in our country, in Jerusalem, is only his perceptible image."

How can it be said that the flesh-and-blood Jew of Palestine is only a "perceptible image"? No one but a Hellenized Jew could hope to understand. For him the real man was not made of flesh and blood; he was a disincarnate being.

This is but one example of Philo's idealization of the miraculous yet down-to-earth Bible stories. In the history of the patriarchs Philo saw only an allegorical description of various spiritual conditions. Once more, facts were swept aside to make place for notions and ideas. God's covenant with the Children of Israel was not looked upon as a *berith*, a concrete agreement; it became an intellectual concept, an abstract bond, which provided material for theological study but did not influence everyday life.

This is what happened to Palestinian Judaism under the influence of Greek philosophy. Even forms of worship were affected. The great holy days, instead of being reconstructions of past events, took on a philosophical meaning. As André Néher has put it, "Some Jews succumbed to the temptation of allegorizing the Mosaic Passover. Philo of Alexandria, the leading interpreter of Hellenistic Judaism, explained the exodus in idealistic terms. To go out of Egypt, he said, meant to overcome matter, to accede to the universe of the soul, to make the mysterious transition from the somatic to the pneumatic state."<sup>1</sup> Admirable subtleties! But for André Néher, who is not devoid of malice, and for the Palestinian Jews, to go out of Egypt has still another meaning, and one which Philo did not guess; it means, quite simply, to achieve liberation.

During Jesus' three days in the Temple he did not see the Septuagint version of the Holy Scriptures. The doctors did not expound Greek idealism; their talk was not

<sup>1</sup> Moïse, *La vocation juive*, p. 127.

of Plato but of Moses. And even at this early date Jesus probably showed that he had ideas of his own. At twelve years of age, Greco-Latin intellectual influence was beyond his understanding, and he probably learned more from what he saw and heard than from any number of books. Even so the presence of the Romans must have made a vivid impression upon him.

Beside the Roman soldiers and bureaucrats, he must have been aware of the constant stream of visitors from Italy, Alexandria and Heliopolis. As always, when a nation with an old culture is conquered and occupied there are, among the conquerors, admirers who pay it a not totally disinterested homage. In the outer courts of the Temple there must have been foreign hangers-on who knew the Hebrew language or admired the Hebrew faith and were willing to be instruments of Roman penetration. Roman students of the Torah and the Talmud were enabled by the occupation to meet at first hand the doctors of the Law. Probably they addressed them with a mixture of intellectual deference and military bravado, such as those practiced during the occupation of France by former German students who came in army uniform to pay their respects to their old professors at the Sorbonne.

On the other hand, many more Romans showed hostility or contempt for the Jewish religion. It was a well-known fact that the Emperor Augustus had congratulated his grandson for not having gone out of his way to visit the Temple of Jerusalem. In his wish to centralize in his palace the religious life of all the countries con-

quered by Rome the emperor seemed to consider the Temple "a suspect municipal sanctuary."<sup>1</sup>

But what must have shocked the doctors more than any rebuff to their own beliefs was the nature of the Roman religion to which they were called upon to defer. No monotheist could fail to be horrified upon hearing that a hundred years before the birth of Jesus the Roman consul Quintus Mutius Scaevola had proposed to divide the gods into three categories: those invented by poets, those conceived by philosophers and those whose worship had been installed by politicians. To any Jew it was a double profanation to separate divinity into categories dependent upon the social or intellectual class of the worshipper.

The Latins, with their analytical spirit, fitted their gods to the needs they were called upon to fill. As William Seston says: "Among the Romans religion came to be the most reliable government police." As for foreign gods, they were made into allies or satellites of the Romans; every conquered city gave its gods to the conquerors. "Something sacred was attached to these cities which the gods had built and continued to fill with their presence. We know that Roman tradition had promised Rome eternity, and other cities had traditions of the same kind. Every city was built with the idea that it would endure forever." And so Rome bolstered up its own eternity by adding to it that of the cities which it had conquered. Only one city refused to play such a role,

<sup>1</sup> Jean Bayet: *Histoire politique et psychologique de la religion romaine*, p. 176.

and this was Jerusalem, whose single, transcendent, revealed God was beyond the Romans' comprehension and never assimilated by them; indeed, he claimed to overtake and supersede all others.

The Romans situated their gods in space, within the walls of conquered cities. By such localization they thought to obtain eternity. To the Jews, on the contrary, eternity had nothing to do with any earthly locality, any situation in space. They incarnated eternity in history and conceived it in time. The Roman religion was not universal; it was nationalistic and annexationist. The multiplicity of foreign gods was favorable to religious centralization. Only the religion of Israel, the religion of Jesus, had universality. Those who follow God's law, even if they do not believe in God, participate with Israel in salvation. Israel had no reason to be swayed by foreign cults, whose beliefs and rites it disapproved, although it did not condemn their believers.

The great scandal of Jesus' time was that the religion of Israel was dominated by pagans and in certain respects influenced by them. By virtue of the occupation the substructure of religious faith and practice upon which monotheism had rested for so many hundreds of years was beginning to crumble. At just the time when Jesus spent the famous three days in the Temple his impressionable mind must have been struck by the intensity of the clash between the Greco-Latin and Jewish worlds, which was to be the cause of much of the suffering he had to endure as a grown man. This clash also had fatal consequences for the destiny of Israel. It was the basis of the acerbation of the quarrel between Israel

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and Rome, which was brought about by a new religion, Christianity.

The beginning of Christianity, which may be traced back, in part, to the young Jesus' meditations in the Temple, did not stem so much from a cleavage between Jesus and the tradition of his own people as it did from a conflict between Israel and the pagans.

# *After Jerusalem*

PART THREE

# 9.

## From the "Kaddish" to the "Our Father"

OF THE years of Jesus' life following his visit to the Temple practically nothing is known and we cannot reasonably hazard conjectures about them. The childhood and youth of any man, no matter how exalted his destiny, can be to some degree reconstructed on the basis of the social and historical background of his times. Hence we were able at least to describe the influences to which Jesus was subjected as a boy.

But after the decisive days in the Temple the historian is faced by a mystery. Within a developing conscience dedicated to God there was played out a drama which is surely one of the most amazing and, in the literal sense of the word, consequential, which the world has known. By means natural or supernatural (here is matter for unending discussion) there came into being a crucial mutation in human thought and in the story of God on earth and his relations with man.

It is inevitable that the mystery should endure and that it should defy minute analysis. Proudhon, one of the atheists most attracted to the person of Jesus, derides those who seek to reduce the events of his life to everyday dimensions. It would be ridiculous, he says, to ask whether the disciples ate with forks at the Last Supper.

Let us not be guilty of any such absurdity. When it comes to the last of the hidden years we should be concerned less with facts, impossible to ascertain, than with the direction and significance of Jesus' spiritual itinerary. This can be traced, however imperfectly, only by a continued examination of the circumstances surrounding a young Jew of his time. There are two facts—both of them controversial—to guide us.

The first of these is the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, which prove that during Jesus' life certain Jewish groups—either belonging to the sect of the Essenes or inspired by it—lived in cloistered religious communities. Troubled by the religious crisis which we have described in the preceding chapter, they announced the coming of a "New Covenant" and set up a rule of life similar to that later adopted by Christian religious orders. Poverty, chastity, baptism, communal meals, abandonment of the sacrifices in the Temple and the cultivation of inner devotion—these precepts were formulated by the "Teacher of Righteousness," whom we may be tempted to regard as a forerunner of Jesus as the Christ or Messiah. Many of his followers lived a definitely ascetic existence in something like monasteries; others were married and lived in the world, constituting a sort of "Third Order," less strict but bound by the same moral laws and

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participating in the same hope of a "New Covenant."

Did Jesus know the Dead Sea monasteries at first hand, or did he hear about them from Saint John the Baptist, just before beginning his ministry? Scholars will have to decide. It is certain, in any case, that the Qumrân sect marked a transition between the strict Judaism which Jesus knew during his childhood at Nazareth and the later trend, closer to Christianity, which was in the process of development toward the end of his formative years. Did Essene ideas influence the Gospels or were they derived from them? They are, in any case, characteristic of the times.

From a strictly Jewish point of view the discovery of the existence of these religious communities has renewed one of the problems with which Israel is repeatedly confronted. Because the Jewish religion is that of a living God, because it is written into history, it has always opposed asceticism. A well-known passage of the Talmud enjoins man not to isolate himself from society. It is by the paths of immanence and everyday living that man is best enabled to put into practice God's law. The rabbi, as we have seen, is not a professional priest, the synagogue is not a temple, and the blessings are applied to all the acts of daily life, fitting them into a religious context, but not transforming their nature or separating them from the rest of the world.

Perhaps, at moments of religious crisis, a segment of Israel is justified in standing apart from a corrupt and hence threatened society, in creating a spiritual reservoir which may make up for the general degradation of the faith. To such a purpose the Talmud gives its approval.

In any case, the least we can say about the Dead Sea communities is that they raised problems of which Jesus was certainly aware.

The second fact, or event, which we can with relative certainty attach to the last part of Jesus' hidden years is the death of Joseph, the head of the family into which he was born and before the law his presumptive father. It is probable that Joseph died at about this time and that Jesus was called upon to pray at the family tomb. The apochryphal Gospels give the text of a prayer which does not fit in with what we know of the Jewish liturgy of the time and must have been composed later. It is more likely that Jesus said a prayer, dating from the period of the second Temple, which is still said by the orphans of today.

The text of this prayer, called the *Kaddish*, as we have it, is in literary Aramaic, a language closer than Biblical Hebrew to what Jesus spoke. Its intonations may well be those of his voice, in conversation with his friends or in his preaching at the synagogue. The prayer itself is fundamental; it is one that throughout the centuries has been part of the fabric of Jewish life. At one time it was used in schools at the end of a teaching session. Then it passed into the synagogue service, where it marks the passage from one part to another. For two thousand years the faithful have stood up to hear it pronounced, several times over, as a recurrent theme of praise. Later on it became the intercessory prayer which a son said for his father, in bidding him a last farewell. At Jesus' time it did not have this particular purpose. But he must have

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heard it said and even have pronounced it himself when he occupied Joseph's place in the synagogue and stood up to lament his absence. Here then is the text:

Magnified and sanctified be his great Name in the world which he hath created according to his will. May he establish his kingdom during your life and during your days, and during the life of all the house of Israel, even speedily and at a near time, and say ye, Amen.

Let his great name be blessed for ever and to all eternity.

Blessed, praised and glorified, exalted, extolled and honored, magnified and lauded be the name of the Holy One, blessed be he; though he be high above all the blessings and hymns, praises and consolations, which are uttered in the world; and say ye, Amen.

Amen.

May there be abundant peace from heaven, and life for us and for all Israel; and say ye, Amen.

Amen.

He who maketh peace in his high places, may he make peace for us and for all Israel; and say ye, Amen.

A translation, no matter how faithful to the meaning and even the rhythm of the original, cannot hope to catch its intonation. I should like to transcribe here the first verse, if only in order to give an idea of the sounds familiar to Jesus' ear and tongue:

Yis-gad-dal v'yis-kad-dash sh'meh rab-bo, b'ol-mo  
di'v-ro kir'-u-seh v'yam-lich mal-chu-seh, b'cha-ye-chon

u-v'yo-me-chon u-v'cha-yeh d'chol bes yis-ro-el, ba-a-go-lo  
u-viz-man ko-riv, v'im-ru O-men.

The Kaddish, so commonly used in Jesus' time, as in our own, has more than a retrospective interest, for it is perpetuated in the fundamental prayer of the Christian Church, the so-called "Lord's Prayer," or "Our Father," many of whose themes and expressions are of Jewish origin. Here we have the transition from one religion to the other, as it matured in the latter half of the hidden years, after Jesus' visit to the Temple.

It has been said that the Our Father is a Jewish prayer, and there is textual evidence to support the assertion. The very first word, "our," reflects the use of the plural form which is traditional in any prayer which Jews offer up together. Thus during the Yom Kippur service every Jew recites a list of sins which all Israel may have committed during the year, even although he himself is not guilty of them. The Talmud explains this habit of collective prayer: "Abbai says: 'A man must associate the whole community with his prayer and say, for instance: "May it be thy will, Eternal God, to direct us toward peace.'"'" (Berakot, 30 a.)

As we have said, the Lord's Prayer abounds in phrases from Jewish ritual. We shall proceed, at the risk of tediousness, to list them. Actually, every one is so pregnant with religious meaning and tradition that their mere enumeration is more eloquent than any commentary.

"Our Father who art in heaven" is the Hebrew *Abinu she-ba-shamayim*, which we have seen in the translation of the Kaddish.

"Hallowed be thy name" is almost identical with the *Kaddish*'s first sentence.

"Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done . . ." An echo of the prayer called *Alenu*, which voices hope in the advent of the Messianic era and Jewish universalism: "Therefore do we wait for thee, O Lord our God, soon to behold thy mighty glory . . . Then shall the inhabitants of the world . . . accept the yoke of thy kingdom, and thou shalt be King over them speedily forever . . ."

"Give us this day our daily bread . . ." In Proverbs 30:8 we find: "Feed us with food convenient for us." And let us not forget the passages in the Torah (Exodus, 16:15-19) and the Talmud (Sotah 48 b) concerned with manna.

"Forgive us our trespasses . . ." An echo of the sixth benediction of the *Shemoneh-Esreh*: "Forgive us, our Father, for we have sinned against thee. Wash away our transgressions from before thine eyes. Blessed art thou, O Lord, who dost abundantly forgive . . ."

"Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil," an idea frequently expressed in the Psalms and commented upon by the Talmud.

"For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory," echo of one of the numerous formulas of glorification pronounced in the synagogue upon the showing of the Torah.

And so we see that many passages of Christianity's fundamental prayer come straight out of equally fundamental Jewish prayers, which Jesus pronounced during the hidden years. Nor is this true of the Lord's Prayer alone. The *Magnificat* is drawn almost entirely from the

Psalms and the Prophets. If we read, in the light of modern criticism, the ritual of the great Jewish holidays we find any number of themes that recur in the Gospels and in Christian liturgy.

There are more resemblances than we ordinarily realize in the dogma of the two religions as well. In the Synoptic Gospels Jesus repeatedly proclaims his attachment to the Jewish faith. This is best illustrated by the passage in St. Mark (12:28 ff.):

And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, Which is the first commandment of all?

And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; the Lord our God is one Lord:

And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment.

And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.

Jesus' reply is doubly rooted in Jewish tradition. Firstly, because it repeats two fundamental texts of Judaism, the *Shema Israel*, which is the cornerstone of monotheism, and the law of love for God and man (Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18), which is the foundation of all morality, and secondly, because it is

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almost identical with the words with which Jesus' learned contemporary, Hillel, answered the pagan's question about the essence of the Torah (see p. 154 above). In short, Jesus here manifested both his fidelity to the Law and his acquaintance with the rabbinical tradition.

There are numberless other examples. In a book printed by the Vatican press, the Reverend Joseph Bonsirven has made "a selection of rabbinical texts of the first two Christian centuries pertinent to the understanding of the New Testament." He has made thousands of extracts from Jewish commentaries, such as the *Pirke Abot*, the *midrashim* and the tractates of the Talmud. Not all these fragments had, in Jesus' time, been put together. But in their orally transmitted form they were the basis of the doctors' teaching.

On a smaller scale than the Rev. Joseph Bonsirven, Jewish writers, ever since the beginning of the nineteenth century, have explored the origin of the Gospels. Here are the findings of one of them, Rabbi Elias Słowęczyk, on the Sermon on the Mount. Every one of the Beatitudes, which are perhaps the most important statement of Jesus' teaching, can be matched with a quotation from the Talmud.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit . . ." recalls the words of Rabbi Levitas in the Talmud (*Abot IV*, 4) on the benefits of humility and those of Rabbi Akiba (*Ketubot 50 a*) on the golden mean.

"Blessed are they that mourn . . ." is reminiscent of the idea expressed in the Talmud (*Erubin 41 b*) that "unhappiness redeems souls."

"Blessed are the meek . . ." seems to go back to the Talmud text (*Sukkah* 29 b): "The meek possess the earth and enjoy indestructible peace."

"Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness . . ." takes up what the Talmud (*Baba Batra* 10 a) has to say on justice and charity.

"Blessed are the merciful . . ." Compare with the Talmud (*Shabbat* 151 b): "If any man pities another, God will pity him."

"Blessed are the peacemakers . . ." Compare with the Talmud (*Shabbat* 10 b), which calls upon the "God of peace."

"Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake . . ." Compare the Talmud (*Baba Kamma* 93 a): "It is better to be persecuted than to persecute."

"Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you and shall say all manner of evil things against you falsely, for my sake . . ." Compare the Talmud (*Shabbat* 118 b), which extols "those who let themselves be insulted, without insulting in return."

That part of the Sermon on the Mount which follows the Beatitudes is equally studded with sayings from the Talmud.

"Rejoice, and be exceeding glad; for great is your reward in heaven . . ." Compare the Talmud (*Shabbat* 118 b): "It is glorious, and I envy it, the fate of those who are suspected when they do not deserve suspicion."

"Ye are the salt of the earth . . ." The word "salt" was frequently used and highly significant among the Jews. It was an image of incorruptibility and hence of the permanence of God's covenant with Israel. An indis-

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soluble alliance was called “salted.” This image goes back to Numbers 18:19: “It is a covenant of salt forever before the Lord unto thee and to thy seed with thee.” In the Talmud (*Keubot*) we find a very practical commentary: “Every food requires salt for its preservation. Money, too, must be salted if we wish to keep it. But in this case the salt is charity.”

The large number of Talmudic phrases scattered throughout the important text of the Sermon on the Mount shows to what extent Jesus was influenced, during his formative years, by the commentaries on the Law. We must look not only in the Old Testament but also in the Talmud for the source of his mode of expression. There are affinities between the Talmud and the Gospels, these two branches of the same tree. Affinities of form, such as we have seen exemplified above, and certain affinities of thought, along with equally important divergences.

Both offshoots of Old Testament Judaism have the same moral tone. In his book *Jewish and Christian Morality* the great Rabbi Elie Benamozegh shows that Christian charity has its roots in Jewish tradition. He quotes the description of God in Exodus (34:6) as “merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth,” and the words of the prophet Micah (6:8): “O man . . . what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” He cites also one of the initiators of the rabbinical tradition, Simon the Just, who several centuries before Jesus maintained that society rested on three pillars: the Torah, worship and acts of kindness.

Talmudists of Jesus' time or later, such as Hillel (whom we have already quoted) and Akiba, voiced precepts of the same kind. "Love your neighbor as yourself," said Akiba; "that is the great principle of the Law."

The Christian virtue of humility is Jewish, and more particularly Pharisaic in origin. We have only to consider this one of many Talmudic sentences, which might have come straight out of the Gospels: "Remain hidden . . . He that lowers himself shall be raised up, and he that raiseth himself up shall be brought low. He who humbles himself here on earth for the Law shall be glorified in the life to come. He who makes himself small for the Law's sake shall be made great hereafter."

The content, then, is very much the same. What is even more surprising, more illuminating of the mystery of Jesus' hidden years, is the fact that the mode of reasoning of the *midrash* and the Talmud is carried over into many parts of the Gospels. Jewish tradition was to Jesus not only a source of phrases and precepts but of ideas as well. He found in it a dialectic form, which remains recognizable in his use of it, in spite of definite modification.

The reasoning of the *midrash* and Talmud has two different aspects. First, as we have seen, in order to understand a verse of the Scriptures and to extract its full poetical and practical significance, other verses, from different books of the Bible, are rallied around it. Apropos of a passage from Exodus the commentator quotes another from Job, or the Prophets or the Psalms. He moves always within the Word of God, without searching for outside references or explanations. In the Gospels, like-

wise, whenever there is a question of showing that Jesus is the expected Christ or Messiah, the proof is furnished by an Old Testament quotation, found to be applicable to the situation.

For instance, the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah describes, without naming him, the “servant” of Jehovah.

*He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.*

The Talmudists, too, have striven to resolve the “servant’s” identity. According to the Talmud of Babylon, he is Moses; according to that of Jerusalem, he is Rabbi Akiba.

When St. Mark (15:28) says that the prophet was foretelling the coming of Jesus Christ, he is adding another element to the Pharisaic debate. He follows the same train of thought as that of his predecessors, but he comes to a different conclusion. He feels he must prove that the Passion was foreshadowed in the prophetic tradition, and it is by the Talmudic method that he does so.

In the Gospel according to St. Matthew, when the Pharisees speak against Jesus for his expulsion of devils, he turns their own method of argument against them.

. . . . When the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils.

And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to deso-

lation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand:

And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand?

And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out? therefore they shall be your own judges.

But if I cast out devils, by the spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you.

The Pharisees may have quarreled with his conclusion, but they were thoroughly familiar with the method by which he reached it.

A detailed study of the Gospels would enable us to pick out a very large number of examples of rabbinical influence, in content, in phraseology and in argumentation. And this would constitute a precious revelation of the workings of Jesus' mind during the critical last portion of his hidden years.

Everywhere we find Jesus expressing himself in rabbinical style. He used both the parable (*mashal*) and the commentary (*derasha*) to expound fundamental Jewish ideas. And when, in the course of his preaching, he came back to speak in the synagogue of Nazareth the astonishment of his hearers was not due either to his references to the Scriptures or to the language in which he set them forth.

Obviously we must not overlook the startling departure which his teaching represented from the rabbinical tradition. The present book is concerned with a period midway between two mysteries, two religions. Our lim-

ited purpose is to describe the difference between them and to look (as we shall in the next chapter) into its natural or historical causes. Anything supernatural is outside our province.

The first way in which Jesus did surprise his hearers, who were accustomed to Pharisaic sermons and Talmudic discussions, was in his mode of address. When the Gospels quote Jesus' words we find him speaking in the first person and almost always beginning with the phrase: "Verily, I say unto you," or some close equivalent. No matter how derivative may have been what followed, this introduction represented a sharp break with tradition. The Talmud, as we have seen, is an open forum where the search for truth is carried on by juxtaposing one doctor's opinion with another's. "Rabbi So-and-So says this . . ."; "Rabbi So-and-So says that . . ." There is no question of employing the first person. Opinions are articulated, contradictorily or complementarily, in a never-ending debate, which always leaves room for new entries. In other words, there is no individual source of the truth. The Talmud's teaching is collective, and to the best of my knowledge no selection of excerpts has tried to classify the opinions expressed under their authors' names. The collectivity of the enterprise corresponds with the strong Jewish feeling that the commentary of the Law is a manifestation of the covenant not between God and an individual but between God and the whole community of Israel.

It was, then, a bold innovation on Jesus' part to raise his voice in the synagogue, not in reference to such and such a Talmudist, but in self-expression and the appropri-

ation of certain elements of the doctors' ideas, which he adapted to his own. It must have been a scandal to the Pharisees that he should show a spirit of independence and initiative to which not even Moses had laid claim. He spoke in the Name of God, not through the vehicle of tradition, but as if he had a personal covenant with Him. To a Jewish mind these two words, "personal" and "covenant" were contradictory. Suddenly the collective search for truth of the Jewish people had become the enterprise of a new prophet and preacher, more enterprising than any of his predecessors.

The second innovation which Jesus brought to his preaching, as the Gospels relate it, is less easy to define but perhaps more laden with consequences. Jewish Biblical tradition does not always feel impelled to pronounce itself clearly on factual occurrences. It considers the universe sacred both in general and in detail, both in the broad sweep of its history, as willed by God, and in every minor anecdote which contributes to it. There is no distinction between the sacred and the profane, between a natural and a supernatural order. There is no isolated miracle; everything that happens under heaven is both human and divine. No atom of matter is without a force linked to universal power; every deed or act, no matter how unimportant it may seem to be, is bound to the cosmic destiny and may influence its development.

The Jewish conception of a miracle is, then, a very particular one. A Jew with a deep understanding of human nature sees every action as both concrete and allegorical, rational and miraculous. On account of this ambivalence he lends more significance to the meaning of

an event than to its actuality. The Hebrews who lived at the time of the Burning Bush or the passage of the Red Sea would have laughed, or rather they would have been deeply shocked to hear that today popular scientists, eager to bolster up religion, marshal facts to prove that such things actually took place or existed.

You may ascertain, if you please, whether or not forks were used at the Last Supper. You may study the rhythm of the tides, the motion of the currents, the annals of seismology in order to explain why the waters of the Red Sea parted to let the Children of Israel go through and then closed over their Egyptian pursuers. Analyze the emanations of natural gas from the vegetation atop Mount Horeb in explanation of the Burning Bush, adduce seasonal rains as the cause of the Flood . . . To a Biblical Jew, to a Jew of Jesus' time, versed in the Talmud and the *midrash*, your efforts would seem utterly profane. To him the material event is only the matrix in which lies embedded the precious stone of significance.

Little does it matter whether the passage of the Red Sea took place according to the account in Exodus . . . or whether it took place at all. What matters is that God inspired this story, so that men should believe it. It is a *mashal*, or parable, that typical form of Jewish narration, an allegory more real than fact. To a Jew the passage of the Red Sea is not an historical event like the battle of Austerlitz or the retreat from Moscow. It is God's answer to the anxiety which He had produced with the Flood. In order to free men from fear, to show them that never again in the course of history would He destroy them, God brought dry land out of water, just

as in Noah's time he had flooded the dry land. Mount Sinai is the counterpart of Mount Ararat; a symbol of mercy after a symbol of wrath. As we have said before, the passage of the Red Sea is the antithesis of the Flood.

Having gained his perspective, let us return to Jesus' preaching, to the form which it wore and the essential paradox within it. As an heir to the Jewish tradition, Jesus knew that a fact was less important than its interpretation. But just at his time the Greco-Roman spirit was abroad in the land, the Septuagint Bible was dessicating and rationalizing Jewish religious tradition, and the political turmoil was such as to arouse a presentiment of the coming of God's kingdom. Both Jesus and his hearers were suspended between two radically different world outlooks and interpretations. To the Jews the world was sacred, and what was important was its inner significance. To the Romans it was profane: measurement, logic and all that in the future was to make what we call science held the first place in their minds.

Jesus, whose mission was to extend monotheism to the pagan world, was intellectually torn, and even tortured, long before he was physically crucified by the idolaters. According to the Gospel account of his words, we can see that they unwittingly exposed him to two kinds of misunderstanding.

In the first place, during the early years of Jesus' life, Greco-Latin influence was causing the metaphors of the Holy Scriptures to receive a factual explanation. The *mashal* or parable was acquiring what we should call a "documentary" value. Let us take an example from the Psalms. Originally no one thought of taking literally

their highly imaged expressions. But as they were read in Greco-Roman circles, "their poetical symbols," says Theodore Reinach, "were materialized and transformed into tangible realities. The afflicted man whose sufferings are purely spiritual is considered physically ill; the vinegar which a man of ill will pours into the beggar's alms basin becomes real vinegar given to Jesus on the Cross, and the figurative casting of lots for his garments (Ps. 22:18) is concretely carried out by the Roman soldiers."

What happened to the Psalms may also have happened to the Gospels. As a somewhat unconventional commentator of the New Testament, Paul Couchoud, observes: "The multiplication of loaves, which later came to represent the perpetuity of the Eucharist, the miraculous catch of fish, which was taken to signify the netting of men's souls by the Gospel . . . It is useless to enquire when and where these events occurred; they occur over and over, but only as symbols of a spiritual reality."

Now we come to the second kind of misunderstanding between the Biblical Jews, from whom Jesus sprang, and the Romans. This too played a part in his Passion. For not only do historical events have a different meaning for Romans and Jews; even the words in which they are described are subject to widely divergent literal or symbolic interpretation.

When Jesus admitted to being "King of the Jews," his Roman judges took it as a revolutionary statement, directed against their own Emperor. But to Jesus, faithful to the tradition of his fathers, it was the echo of a midrash phrase, which had a spiritual, not a political

meaning. If we were to take up, one by one, the expressions which stud Jesus' teaching and which, by the reaction they provoked in Jews and Romans, led to his disfavor with both of them, we should see what different interpretations they received, according to the religious background of the hearer. As Jules Isaac has pointed out,<sup>1</sup> the appellations "son of God" and "son of Man" designated in the Jewish tradition a spiritual sonship, which was accredited to both angels and kings of Israel, particularly David. "It is certain that the idea of an actual divine sonship was unknown in Jesus' time and would have been inconceivable to him; it was utterly alien to the rigidity of his monotheistic faith and its notion of divine transcendence." In other words, it had an allegorical value.

Similarly, to quote Monsignor Ricciotti, the expression "kingdom," as we see it in St. Matthew's Gospel, does not refer to a given moment of evolution when God will reign on earth. Once more, this would be a literal interpretation, consonant with the religious ideas of the Romans but not with those of the Jews.

During the hidden years, this mysterious period of meditation which prepared him for his brief ministry and violent death, Jesus found himself at the junction, in both time and space, of two civilizations. On one side Jewish tradition, on the other ancient Rome, the greatest pagan power of its day. For the first time the Biblical spirit came up against the Latin mind, enamored of clarity, logic and practical efficiency, in which religious faith was subordinated to the demands of the state.

<sup>1</sup> *Jésus et Israel*, p. 233.

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Jesus was rooted in one of these civilizations and obliged to manifest himself in the other. Any oversimplified explanation of his inner debate, any attempt to cast the whole blame of his execution on either the Jewish or the Roman camp, is a distortion of its true perspectives and a mutilation of its significance, both divine and human. Jesus' Passion and death came out of the fatal clash of two civilizations. Only thus do they make sense historically and also acquire a deep religious meaning.

Jew, Christian and unbeliever must all admit that in an event of this magnitude, however it is interpreted, imponderables have a large part to play. From the Kaddish to the Our Father, the derivation, the heritage are clear. But in order to understand the extraordinary role which the last of Jesus' hidden years played in the evolution of the world, we must be ready to believe that they coincided with a turning point in the story of God and his manifestations on earth.

# 10.

## A Turning Point in the Story of God

**T**HE story of God's manifestations on earth contains two kinds of elements, one human, one divine.

We consider as emanating from God anything that seems to exceed the grasp of man's imagination. This means "revelations," those eruptions of unexpected evidence, those sudden announcements of unprecedented but dazzling truth, which seem to surpass anything that man could possibly conceive unless some spiritual force outside him had inspired them. Why was monotheism revealed to a primitive people, surrounded by idolatry? The moral law to men enslaved to the same instincts as wild beasts, except that by virtue of their superior intelligence they had made them more efficient, more murderous? The fact that there were human voices to say the *Shema*, the great monotheistic prayer, that other voices tamed their guttural accents and vehement tone in order to pronounce the love of God and neighbor, that

Abraham and Moses were able, as mere men, to interpret a Law that was beyond their understanding, that Jesus came and breathed sanctity into the pagan world—all these are historical proofs of the existence of a world beyond our own.

Another proof is the extraordinary phenomenon of the berith, the Covenant, which in a world where men, nations and religions constantly perish confers permanence upon its signatories. The amazing permanence of Israel, puniest, and most persecuted of peoples, the permanence of the Christian Church, which seems to share the privilege of withstanding all assaults and surviving all those who seek to destroy it . . .

Such are some of the traces of God's story upon earth. But the trajectory of these divine elements is crossed at every moment by human elements. Man, by definition, is mistrustful of absolutes and hostile to Eternity. In order to assimilate and tolerate them he must feed on marginal notes to history. He must cut down the sublime perspectives which he cannot hope to understand to the measure of his trivial anxieties and sorrows. God's story is too simple; revelation does not allow man to satisfy his taste for quibbling. The Covenant is too heavy for him to bear; it does not offer him sufficient petty consolations. In short, he is as ill at ease as a slum dweller in a mediaeval cathedral; he is tempted to scribble on the walls and to light candles for the fulfillment of his own prayers. The story of God upon earth is made up in part of such small-scale petitions and familiarities.

The turning point in the story of God was not, then,

a change of revealed truth; it was a re-evaluation of the man to whom it was addressed. In moments of crisis there rise to the surface of man's conscience all the primitive fear and cruelty which for a few miserable centuries revelation has tried to conquer. He falls from grace and formulates demands which have nothing to do with the terms of the Covenant; he wants to be consoled and rewarded and made happy. And God, in order to keep His place in history, to avoid being side-tracked, is obliged to make concessions to His creature.

He might have done it regretfully, tolerating that which He is unable to prevent, making allowances for human weakness and ignorance. But because, ever since the beginning, man has been the agent of His will, the raw material of His creation, the source of His glory, His problem is how to build on human frailty, to open a new road back to perfection. Every one of man's insufficiencies should contribute to the grandeur of God. Every weak and commonplace attribute of his nature poses a new paradox, and from paradox to paradox God's story is accomplished.

At the time when Jesus was growing up, a crisis had been brewing with Judaism for two hundred years. The paradox out of which Christianity was to be born was in the process of formation.

The revelation to which Israel had borne witness burst, as we have seen, upon a world closely bound to the sacred. For two thousand years this feeling for the sacred nurtured the human soul. This is something which it is difficult to imagine today. There were none of the problems or anxieties raised by the conflict between

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the sacred and the profane. "The universe I live in is sacred," a Jew could say to himself at this time. "Every one of the people I see, the words I pronounce and the gestures I make is in communion with this universe. To be born is to take one's place in this pattern of forces; to die is to leave it behind. But the void from which I came and to which I must return, on either side of the brief moment of awareness which is our life, is also sacred and also bound to God. Without benefit of mythology or anthropomorphism, the universe takes me in when I no longer exist just as it took me before I existed."

At the beginning of the period of revelation and covenant Jewish monotheism was a sort of initiation to the universe, to participation in the life of the cosmos. But by Jesus' time doubt had crept in. One of the chief reasons for this was a gradual change in the notions of life after death. Here is the thread by which we may trace the development of the turning point in the story of God which coincided with Jesus' formative years.

To the Biblical Jew of the two thousand years before Jesus' birth, to the contemporary of Abraham or Moses, death meant the dissociation of the elements which go to make up man. First the breath of life, *ruah*, not unlike what the Romans called *animus* or *spiritus* and the Greeks *pneuma*, which Genesis tells that God breathed into his creature:

And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

This is something so immaterial that the Jews, with their love of the concrete, thought of it as the actual air drawn in with breathing. Then there is the body, *basar*, the physical support of existence. These two together, *ruah* and *basar*, form the unit, *nephesh*, which originates at birth and dissolves at death. The *ruah* returns to God and becomes part of a sort of reservoir of breath, no longer attached to any earthly individual, while the *basar* crumbles into dust. The personality is broken up in such a way that it seems as if nothing were left of the man to whom it had belonged.

But at the moment of death something indefinite and impalpable detaches itself from man, a third element called his shadow, or *repha*, a sort of sub-being, not subject to earthly laws, deprived by death of all energy, which leads a double existence. It lingers with the dead body, in or near the grave; then it becomes a citizen of the empire of the dead, *Sheol*. And so the *ruah* returns to God in a form inconceivable to human intelligence, the body crumbles, and the third element, a barely conscious affair, eludes any anthropomorphic identification. Death is not so much a destruction of life as it is a sort of escape from its framework.

The *Sheol* is neither heaven nor hell nor any other sort of annex or extension of the world we know. It defies any human definition and is, quite literally, "another world." It is the only place where Job was safe from God's anger (Job 14:13); it is at the bottom of an abyss. "At the summit of the mountain of Zion," a rabbinic legend tells us, "there is a sacred rock, the center of the

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Holy of Holies, which is a lid over the abyss. At the foot of Zion is the entrance to the land of the dead."

What sort of existence do the shadowy remnants of our earthly selves lead in this desolate place? An existence which defies our human imagination, without pleasure or pain, without the sight of Jehovah and his works. As Ecclesiastes tells us:

. . . The dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward . . .

. . . Their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion . . . in any thing that is done under the sun.

Life in the Sheol is entirely different from life on earth. It is established on premises so diametrically opposite that it is a complete negation of all that has gone before.

Everything does not disappear with death, but everything's nature changes so radically that to man on earth it is utterly incomprehensible. Man's personality and very existence are no longer rational and individual; they are cosmic, communal and beyond the grasp of reason. Individual consciousness survives only by merging with universal consciousness, and yet it cannot be said that with death everything is finished, everything is reduced to a subliminal level, close to complete oblivion. In death man very nearly gives up whatever it is that distinguishes him from his fellows, the ephemeral personality which differentiates and sets him apart in the framework of time and space, the bundle of feelings and habits

which he needs for life on earth but which, when this is over, are so much dead skin to be sloughed off, so much surplus baggage, so much data on an expired passport.

Perhaps, when his breath has gone into a universal reservoir, his body has crumbled into dust and the spiritual residuum of his personality has descended into the darkness of Sheol, man may be said to have fulfilled the *berith* or covenant which God made with him. Here on earth the Covenant was hobbled by human pride and passion and the restrictions of a rational framework; after death it may make up a part of the great arsenal of physical and psychic forces which God released at the beginning of Creation and which are necessary to its further unrolling in history.

This, then, was the Jewish idea of death during the two thousand years between Abraham and Jesus. Such a complete renouncement of earthly values in life beyond the grave was conceivable only inasmuch as the whole universe was sacred in character. If the universe is sacred, then to merge with it is not equivalent to destruction; it means simply to escape from a partial and imperfect personal existence and to be absorbed by the totality of a creation impregnated by God.

But as, under the influence of idolatrous civilizations, the sacred character of the world was undermined and thrown into doubt, as man began to believe that the matter out of which he was made had an existence of its own, independent of that of any invisible cosmic power, the prospect of merging with the universe after death caused him to suffer anxiety and despair. He wanted to

rediscover in the next world what he had left behind him.

It was then that there emerged a belief in personal survival and in a recompense for both good and evil after death. Quite naturally this belief grew out of a period when the Jews were subject to persecution. It originated inside Israel and created a dilemma. Daniel, a contemporary of the persecutions of Antiochus Epiphanes and the uprising of the Maccabees in 167 B.C., predicted immortality to the victims of persecution and to those who died for their country, and punishment in the next world for the oppressors.

And so, two centuries before Jesus was born, we find signs of a turning point in God's relations with Israel. All around, the world was losing its divine character, and Israel was aware of rifts even within its own monolithic sacred structure. The old concept of death was particularly shaken. There were other changes as well which gave Jesus cause for reflection during his formative years and for the proclamation of new doctrine after he had begun preaching.

Man's fate, or rather man's concept of his fate has seldom undergone a more radical mutation. A whole system of morality was affected.

For the Biblical Jew there was no individual recompense for good or bad actions. The modern idea of a reward for virtue and a punishment for vice—so very consoling, but in the light of everyday experience so improbable—was quite alien to Judaism. The Jew was

quite aware of his personal responsibilities and of the influence of his actions, for good or for bad, upon other people. But instead of hoping or fearing that he himself would suffer the consequences, he held, in accord with his notion of the sacred, that everything he did would add to the order or disorder of the universe. As a Frenchwoman, Madame Renée Néher-Bernheim, has said apropos of the deeply Jewish idea of such cosmic repercussions:

*Every one of our words, gestures and actions has, of course, an effect on our neighbor and on God, or rather on the covenant which binds us to him. It has an effect, also, on the concrete universe, on all its elements which closely or distantly surround us. Every sin makes a crack in the universe, every mitzvah, or good deed, is a reparation. Sages say that if our sinridden world is to endure there must arise thirty-six just men (zaddikim) out of every generation. By their purity they have power to accomplish an expiation (tikkun) and to put back in place, at least partly, the machinery which our sins have thrown into disorder.*

This relationship between human morality and the order of the universe is conceivable only if the latter is sacred. But if the world is profaned by an excess of reason, fragmented and torn asunder by blind forces, then a man's personal responsibility no longer fits into any universal pattern and morality must undergo a radical alteration.

Every action must be individually recompensed; un-

likely as it is in real life, man must pay homage to the idea that wickedness is always punished and virtue always rewarded. This belief is so illogical that the only answer to it is a belief in the existence of absolute evil. Such a development is inevitable. If the world loses its sacred character, if it is no longer suffused by the spirit, then its weak points must receive large injections of religious feeling and even superstition. The Book of Job admits that the just man may be unjustly punished; a few centuries later we have, by popular demand, promises of eternal happiness and the belief that injustice is committed only by error and cannot endure.

The triumph of the profane over the sacred brought about far-reaching changes in the structure of the Jewish religion as well. Up until Jesus' time the Children of Israel were a people of priests. Every man, no matter how insignificant or even unworthy, had, by virtue of the Covenant, a priestly vocation. Other peoples, which did not have the same calling, had equal chances of salvation. Israel's universalism was composed of two elements: the central core of Israel itself, whose immersion in a sacred universe made it the representative of God on earth, and around this core a hierarchy of other peoples, sharing the same history and the same process of elevation. Salvation was open to all peoples, but one alone was its agent.

This sublime and at the same time worldly concept of Israel's mission as a witness for all mankind was likewise conceivable only in a sacred universe. Once this had perished another form of universalism had to take its place. The necessary transformation led to the Christian

Church, to the establishment in a profane world of a mystical rather than a physical community, embracing men of every nation. Christian ceremonies are mysteries and elevations; Jewish ceremonies are, as we have seen, moods of awareness and reconstruction.

The Christian paradox is startling and difficult to understand; it involves sanctifying the profane and offering it, however unworthy it may be, to God, injecting doses of the sacred into an inert universe, rays of light into areas of darkness. Judaism is not constrained to make such an effort, to effect such a transformation. The Jew knows that the world is filled with God and cannot conceive of such a thing as profane reality; hence, as compared to the Christian paradox, his philosophical problems are simple. Israel has the certitude of a permanent, living covenant with God: this is at the same time its privilege and its obligation. Of course, the covenant brings trials and tribulations, which are the harder to endure because they are part and parcel of the Jew's destiny and everyday life. For the whole of its existence Israel has been subjected to crucifixion.

At the time of Jesus' formative years two religious tendencies, springing from the same background, armed with the same precepts and responding to the same fundamental need, began to be distinguished one from the other. They differed in attitude toward the Covenant and the possibility of further revelation. Each one has a sublimity all its own and is consonant with a different temperament. Judaism believes in a permanent miracle, Christianity in a miracle which is a high point transcending everyday reality. In Israel there is still

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something of the Biblical spirit, in which reality escapes the confines of the spatial world and leads, without intermediary, to God. Christianity was grafted onto the Greco-Roman world and in order to rescue the sacred from the profane it needed a God who became man.

Either alternately or together Judaism and Christianity respond to the demands of history. If the hidden portion of Jesus' life marks the indefinable point at which they started to diverge, it is also the time when they shared the same providential mission. The discord was between two religious temperaments. For the Jew, God is everywhere and spontaneously present; for the Christian, His presence must be won anew every day.

# 11.

## A New Turning Point

**I**F THE Jesus of the hidden years were to come back in our day to his reborn native land of Israel, if at the uncertain hours of dawn or dusk, which bring out the eternal aspect of the Palestinian landscape, he were to tread again the streets of Nazareth or the road to Jerusalem, he would find a world prey to the same anxieties as those of two thousand years ago. Are we not now at another turning point of history, at a moment of confusion, when once more the future of mankind hangs in the balance?

In Jesus' time the religion of Israel had to face up to pagans who, although they did not deny the supernatural, conceived of it in the form of idolatry, who betrayed the sacred but did not ignore its existence. Today the revealed religions of Judaism and Christianity are confronted not with idolaters but with deliberate unbelievers, who officially obliterate the notion of God. Today's crisis is far more grave than that of two thousand

years ago. It is a question of whether or not the revealed religions can survive.

What message did Jesus bring to the troubled people of his time? What message would he bring today? What is the spiritual situation he would find if he were to return among us?

One constant: Judaism, the religion of Israel. In spite of the lapse of two thousand years, in spite of increasingly violent persecution and calls to conversion, Judaism remains, a little fossilized around the edges, but fresh and very much alive inside, unapproachable and uncompromising, disdainful of simple solutions, but ready to meet any doubt, any suffering which leads to God. A Jew cannot be satisfied with words or illusions; for him it is not enough to wish for God to believe in Him, to fear death in order to proclaim immortality. He must verify his acts of faith and define his expectations. The trials to which he is therefore submitted and the effort he is called upon to make may lessen the attraction of Judaism for outsiders but they increase the high standards and stamina of those who are within. Today, as it was two thousand years ago, the religion into which Jesus was born is an arsenal of spiritual strength.

One survivor: Christianity. In the course of two thousand years the religion of Jesus has carried on its historic task: the spread of monotheism among idolaters, the introduction of the sacred into a universe profaned by pagans, with the result that God has been made accessible to those who previously turned away. This vocation, complementary to that of Judaism but not exclusive of it, has further progress to make in a world

once more contaminated by idolatry. If Jesus were to return, he would draw upon his Jewish heritage in order to answer the requirements of our times.

And what do our times require? A solution of the fundamental problem of every religion, the problem of holiness. Twice, with an interval of two thousand years between, we have seen a solution. Now, another two thousand years later, shall we be able to solve it again?

The first solution was that of Israel. Since the world in all its elements was dedicated to God, man was meant to acquire awareness of the divine presence and raise the universe to an understanding of the mysteries with which it was impregnated. Hence the rites and benedictions adapted to every passing moment that is written into history, the reconstructions and reenactments which both commemorate the past and keep it alive, the covenant, ever old and ever new, which links the permanence of the universe to the transience of man.

The second solution was contributed by Christianity. As Roman influence caused the world to lose its sacred character and a new, profane world took shape, not built upon a divine plan but according to idolatrous designs, it became necessary to intensify the feeling for the sacred, wherever there was fertile ground. Hence the appeal to the supernatural, the multiplication of miracles, the mysteries of transfiguration, which for the two thousand years of the Christian era have kept the God of monotheism alive and indeed carried His light into realms of darkness.

Now we, in our turn, are called upon to solve the age-old problem. In our day rationalism has attained the

giddy height of its power. No longer does it seek to direct religious fervor to the altars of humanism; it destroys altars and religions alike. The nature of the drama is quite clear, and it is just the same as it was before. There is the same clash as that which Jesus witnessed upon his visit to the Temple—the clash between the Biblical concept of the inspired character, both human and divine, of the universe, and the Roman concept of a world of blind forces which human intelligence may discover, explore and harness without ever being able to modify them. To the Greco-Roman, man is an engineer of these blind forces, to the Semite he is one of them, the most active and conscious and at the same time the most frail.

As frail as Jesus, during his early years, when he stood up for Biblical spirituality against the materialism of the Roman world, as frail as Israel, which all through its history has kept alive the flickering light of conscience amid a world darkened by idolatry. Is the spirit any better armed, any stronger today?

Two thousand years ago, and twice two thousand years ago, at the turning points of God's story upon earth marked by the Christian and the Jewish revelations, the most sacred feasts were those of Easter and Passover.

There are likenesses between them, but also differences, caused by the evolution of God's story and man's in the centuries which stretch from the institution of the one to the institution of the other. They have certain themes in common. The exodus from Egypt, which is the whole theme of the Passover, is a partial theme of

Easter. The Pentateuch and the Prophets furnish the subject matter of certain readings in both celebrations.

The difference lies in their presentation, mode of expression and the two religious temperaments involved. During the paschal meal, the Seder, which is the essential Passover celebration, when the family sits down to bread and wine and bitter herbs, these three things retain their everyday character even if, at the same time, they have a liturgical meaning based upon the role they played in the exodus from Egypt.

The Christian Easter is quite different, and the difference began to take shape at the Last Supper. Obviously this was not yet the Christian celebration of the Resurrection; as far as we know, it was just a regular Seder. Bread and wine were present, but they were consecrated in a new way and acquired a symbolical meaning. The meal was no longer a reconstruction of an historical event, no longer an ordinary meal with an added solemnity about it. It was beginning to be a mystery in which the elements themselves, by means of a transfiguration, participated. The bread became the body of Christ and the wine his blood. The family meal at the family table turned into the mystery of the Eucharist.

Passover and Easter fit in, then, with two different conceptions of the sacred, such as Judaism and Christianity, at an interval of two thousand years, represent them. Today, after another two thousand years have gone by and religion is faced with the necessity of elaborating yet another incarnation of holiness, we may wonder what new kind of paschal celebration awaits us.

In the year when this book was written the Jewish Passover and the Christian Easter fell within a few days of each other. The Old Testament and the New mingled their anniversaries and their commemorations at the very sites which form the background of their stories.

I was myself in Israel and saw the scenes so familiar to my imagination, so marked by the vicissitudes of the history not only of ancient times but also of today. Battles of the 1948 war for independence were waged in the places where the Philistines were thrown back three thousand years before; landmarks of Christianity served as artillery observation posts and coastal fortresses built by the Crusaders looked down on the shores where the passengers of the Exodus were not allowed to disembark. As a victim of frontier folly, the holy city of Jerusalem was divided into two compartments more hermetically sealed than those of Berlin.

On this uncertain ground the problem of the sacred is visible to Christians, Jews and unbelievers. To the faithful of the two revealed religions it is explicit and receives an explicit solution. To unbelievers it has no name, but is present, nonetheless, in the air breathed by Jesus and the patriarchs who went before him.

When Christians worship in a Semitic atmosphere, similar to that into which Jesus was born, their liturgy sometimes undergoes a transformation. At Nazareth, whose present-day population is Arab (that is, Semite), the Roman clergy has given certain ceremonies an Oriental flavor. Half of the Arabs are Roman Catholics, but like the Biblical Jews they think of the whole world as

divinely inspired and make their worship into a reconstruction. The Good Friday service, said in the Arabic language, gives a realistic, almost documentary flavor to Christ's Passion. His body is taken down from the crucifix, covered with flowers, carried through the church and buried. On Palm Sunday there is a similar reenactment of the welcome which Jesus received from the children of Jerusalem. The Mass is accompanied by a procession of children, with gilt wings attached to their shoulders and candles decked with flowers in their hands, who walk around the church and then go out, amid a joyful tumult, onto the porch. The atmosphere is one of ingenuous joy, and the Arabic language, which is Semitic also, has a cadence similar to that which Jesus heard in the synagogue in his day.

At Ein Karem, near Jerusalem, the adaptation of the Roman rite to local conditions is even more striking. Tradition has it that Ein Karem is the site of the Visitation. Here, where Mary came, heavy with child, to visit Elizabeth, there are several Christian monasteries, overlooking one of the valleys which the traveler must cross on the way to Jerusalem. In one of them Hebrew is the language. The Holy Ghost is called *Ruah ha-kedosh* and "Our father, who art in heaven" is *Abinu she-ba-shamayim*. The Good Friday service is just the same as in any other Roman church, but it is in Hebrew. In this land where the tongue of the patriarchs and the prophets, the tongue which Jesus heard in the synagogue, is once more current among men, to hear it in the mouth of a Catholic priest is a stirring experience. When I asked one of the monks what benefit was derived from

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this practice, he told me: "A better understanding of the Gospels. Acquaintance with Hebrew gives new depths of meaning to the Greek original of the Vulgate."

The Israelis, too, have added a new dimension to their Passover celebration. There is a difference, of course, between an observance of a strictly religious nature and one which seems to have turned into a laicized national holiday. The *kibbutzim*, those collective enterprises which have provided for the cultivation of the land and also for its military defense, are in some cases religious in others nonreligious in character.

In a religious community the Passover celebration, held either in the synagogue or in the communal refectory, is the traditional ceremony such as we have described as taking place in every Jewish home. But the fact that the liturgical and the spoken languages are one, so that the faithful can follow the ritual more closely, makes for a feeling of special intimacy. The age-old chants are sung by the *kibbutzniks* all together, clad in their prayer shawls and a cap which in many cases is in the blue-and-white national colors. This is truly the "kingdom of priests" heralded in the book of Exodus.

During the Seder the prayers and stories of the *Haggadah* follow their usual course. God is thanked for having brought Israel out of captivity in Egypt and for all His other benefactions. Traditional fables are told, such as the one concerning the poor lamb, *Had Gadia*, whose subject is the same as that of *The Wolf and the Lamb* of La Fontaine. The whole thing is enlivened and brought up to date by references to the recent war of independence and the Sinai peninsula campaign. The vic-

torious general, Moshé Dayyan, is painted as a successor of Moses. But with all this, the rite remains very much what it was before.

And in a nonreligious *kibbutz*? Because every *kibbutz*, even if it is composed of nonbelievers, holds a Seder. Here, however, there are no prayers, no references to the Scriptures. The emphasis is on the role played by the *kibbutz* in the war for independence. As one leader told me: "We are celebrating not the exodus of the Hebrews from Egypt but the exodus of the Egyptians from Israel." And so the Seder continues, on the allotted days, and all the *kibbutzim* join in, whether in the spirit of the Old Testament or in that of today. Does this mean that the religious rite is laicized? Is it not, rather, that even avowed unbelievers, when they are transplanted to the soil of Israel, are affected by its sacred character?

One thing we can say for sure: the return to the Promised Land and the necessity of defending it have made for a new and close relationship between God and daily life, even if there is no mention of God's name. The Covenant of Mount Sinai, which consecrated Israel to the one God thousands of years ago, has put down new roots, in an age when religious belief is under attack the world over. Have we not here the elements of a new paschal feast, or a new feeling for the sacred, the holy?

For what is "holiness" but a series of victories won by God over His enemies? God's victory over ever-reckless primitive idolatry, that is its enduring meaning to the Jew. God's victory over the more sophisticated

Greco-Roman idolatry, that is its enduring meaning to the Christian. God's victory over atheistic and mechanistic materialism, that is the sacred goal for which we must fight today. Even scientific unbelievers, who reveal to us mysteries which they do not ascribe to God, participate in His second coming. Often they feel a need for it themselves or inspire the need in others.

As long as Christians, Jews and even virtuous unbelievers fail to realize that they are all of them alike threatened by the rising wave of idolatry and profanation, as long as there is internecine strife among the revealed religions and the forces of humanism instead of joint action against their common foe, so long will Israel be persecuted and Jesus nailed to the Cross.

But if Israel's return to the land of patriarchs and prophets, if the united efforts of Jews, Christians and humanistic unbelievers in other countries, aware of their temperamental and historical differences but intent upon subordinating them to a sacred common cause, are of any avail, then the experiences of Jesus as a child and young man will take on a new significance. Instead of repeated intervals of darkness we shall have enduring light.

## About the author of

### JESUS OF NAZARETH: THE HIDDEN YEARS

ROBERT ARON, who is one of France's most distinguished historians as well as one of the most widely read, has the unusual ability of writing books in which a profound knowledge of the subject is reinforced by firsthand personal experience.

He wrote *The History of the Vichy Government*, which took him two years, from a personal knowledge of life in France under the Occupation: in that time he had been arrested twice by the Nazis and had worked in liaison with the American forces.

He wrote *The History of the Liberation of France* as a man who had himself contributed to the Liberation, in preparing for the landing of the Americans in North Africa and in participating for two years in the governments of Giraud and de Gaulle.

Finally he wrote *Jesus of Nazareth: The Hidden Years* because the persecutions of the Hitler era had led him to a reexamination of his own Jewish religious origin and to an awareness of its solidarity with the Christian tradition.

In the words of one of the most eminent contemporary Frenchmen, his books are "as objective as they are thorough and alive—can one say more?" He was awarded the *Légion d'Honneur* for military service and received an *Agrégé de l'Université*. Robert Aron has also been awarded the *prix de l'Académie des Sciences Morales et Politiques*, the *grand prix de l'Académie Française*, and in 1961, the *prix Fémina Vacaresco*, one of the most important literary prizes in France. Published in France in 1960, *Jesus of Nazareth: The Hidden Years* was one of the best selling books of the year.